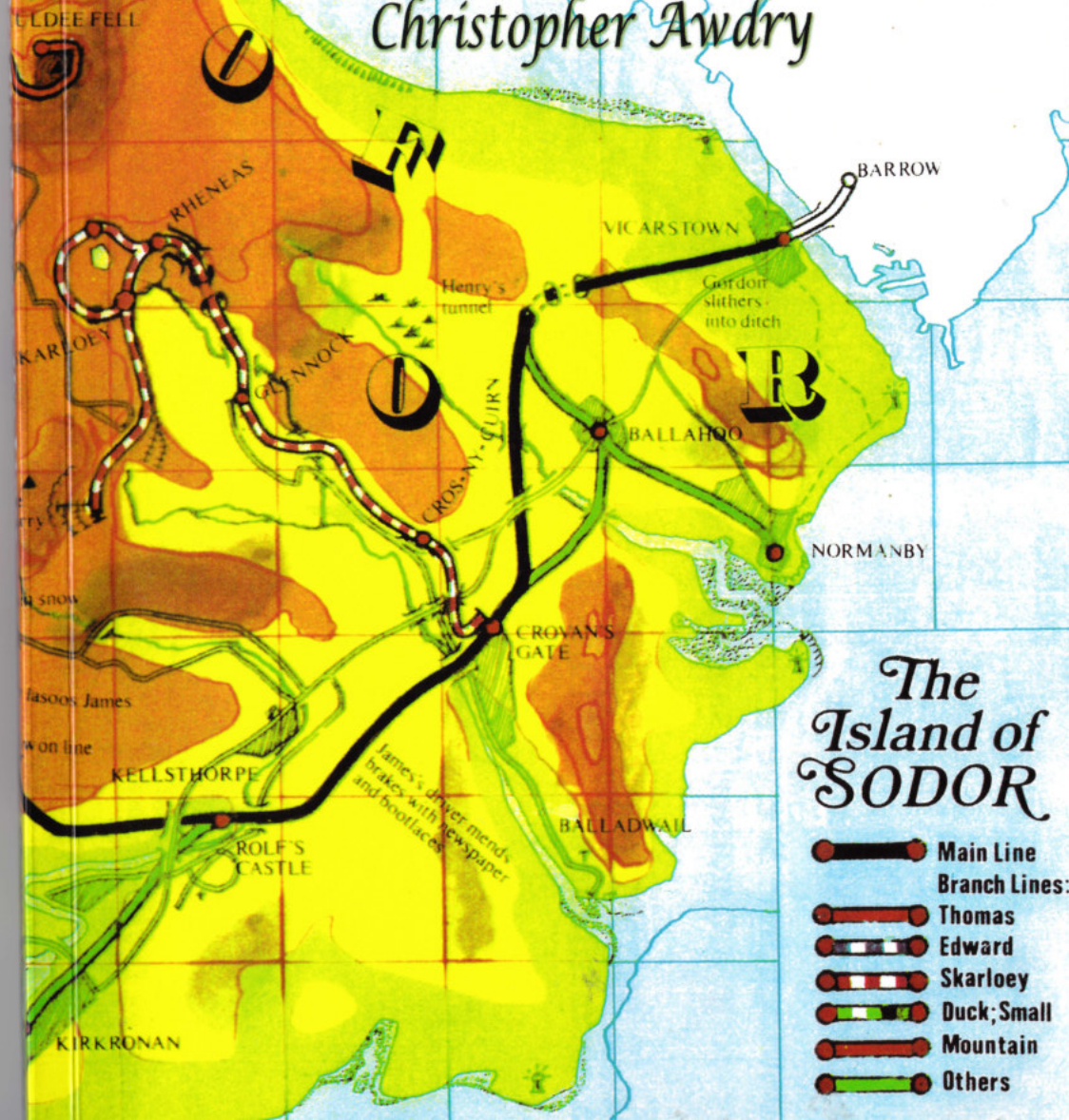


# SODOR

## Reading Between the Lines

Christopher Awdry



### The Island of SODOR

- Main Line
- Branch Lines:
- Thomas
- Edward
- Skarloey
- Duck & Small
- Mountain
- Others

**Why is Thomas blue?**

**What did the Rev'd Awdry think of the TV series?**

**Which story does Percy first appear in?**

These are just three of the many questions, which are asked regularly, and the answers to these and many others are here. *Reading Between the Lines* builds on the popular book published by the Rev'd W Awdry and his brother George in 1987 and now out of print. While covering some of the history of the Island of Sodor, home of Thomas the Tank Engine and his many friends, and listing the friends created by the Awdrys, father and son, this new book concentrates mainly on answering those questions and setting out, story by story, the location, origin and story out-line for every tale so far published in what has become a "Classic" series of children's books.

Yet despite their classic status many of these books have been out of print for up to 10 years, a scandalous situation in many people's eyes. Efforts to improve this are meeting with some success but there is more work to be done – *Reading Between the Lines* pulls no punches in setting out where the author believes the problems lie.

Christopher Awdry, with his father's encouragement, took over the writing of the best-selling Railway Series in 1983. By 1996 he had completed 14 titles, in addition to many Thomas spin off books as result of the TV series, before the publishers, as you will read here, decided to change direction. The author is greatly saddened that he can currently point to only three of about 40 books, which might be available for an author's signature. He continues to tour at home and abroad, however, visiting Days Out with Thomas and other events, and is convinced that this will help to restore classic Thomas stories to a new generation of fans.

# SODOR

## Reading Between the Lines

*Christopher Awdry*

*The best ride*

*Christopher Awdry*



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*Dedication*

*For Thomas lovers, everywhere*

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## Introduction

My father told the story of how Thomas the Tank Engine came about more times than he could count, and I have now run out of fingers too, but I have no doubt that even this particular telling will be a long way from the last. At the age of two and a quarter, during the autumn of 1942, I became ill with measles. Measles was regarded then with perhaps more seriousness that it appears to warrant today, and my fate was three weeks of quarantine, in a darkened room. My father, given the task of amusing me in this extremity, and having exhausted the traditional nursery rhymes of the period, used a rhyme he recalled from his own childhood:-

*Early in the morning  
Down by the station,  
See the little engines  
All in a row.  
Along comes the driver,  
pulls the little lever.  
Peep, peep, chuff, chuff,  
Off we go.*

He illustrated this rhyme with his own rather rudimentary drawings, then made up answers to the questions I asked about them. He then realised that he could develop the answers he concocted into a story, and we were off. By the time I recovered there was a first story about Edward, another about Henry which developed from another rhyme in a similar way, and a third which began "One of the engines in Edward's shed was called Gordon." This was based on a tale that he had heard (so he said) from one of the local railwaymen - King's Norton station was about half a mile down the road - of engines stalling with goods trains on the nearby Lickey Incline, a notoriously steep gradient.

For Christmas that year he made me a toy tank engine out of some odds and ends he had to hand and painted it blue, adding also a number 1 on the sidetank, not because it was the first engine he had made - it wasn't - but for the authentic and practical reasons that engines had numbers and I was the easiest to paint. On request he then made up stories about this engine too, in the process naming it Thomas the Tank Engine.

Any story told *al fresco* rarely comes off the tongue identically at each telling, and I soon began to notice this, stopping Father when I thought he was going wrong. His reaction was to write the stories down so that he could read them and we would therefore get, as he used to say: "...the same version every time." Soon after, my mother, finding, as she thought, no books in the shops suitable for me, urged him to 'do something' with his stories, and eventually, in May 1945, *The Three Railway Engines* was published, to be followed by the four stories about Thomas as *Thomas the Tank Engine* the next year. The story of how this came about can be found in much greater detail than there is room for here, in *The Thomas*

*the Tank Engine Man*, by Brian Sibley, published by Heinemann in 1995 but, sadly, now out of print.

From that time, at a rate of more or less one a year, other titles followed until 1972, by which time my father had written 26 books and 105 stories - there are four stories in each book but five in *Henry the Green Engine*. My own efforts began, with Father's encouragement, in 1983 and continued until 1996, by which time the total number in the series had reached 40. Despite the publisher's reps telling me during the 1990s that "...they didn't have to sell them..." all but 14 had been allowed to go out of print by 1998 and have remained so except for a boxed edition of father's 26 titles produced in 2002 and the special collection in a single volume, again of Father's 26 books, which sells well but is currently (February 2005) also out of print: I am told that a reprint is planned this year. A word of warning, however - since this volume contains only the first 26 books it is not, by any reasonable description, the '*Complete Collection*' described in its title. As regards sales of the Railway Series, I can only say that my PA and I have no difficulty whatever in selling the 14 titles which are currently available at any charity function we are invited to: we are thus forced to conclude that responsibility for the perceived lack of sales that I have been told about by the publisher must rest with their own sales methodology.

A book which told the story of the development of the Island of Sodor - on which the engines run - was written by my father and his brother George and published in 1987. It was called *The Island of Sodor, its People, History and Railways*: this too has been out of print for some time, and even copies through dealers are becoming scarce and expensive. My father lamented the fact that so much had to be left out of this book in order to be able to publish it at an acceptable price: it is with the aim, in part, of filling this gap, and also to mark the 60th anniversary of the publication of that first title in the Railway Series, that Sodor Enterprises publishes this volume. It is slimmer, one fears, than the original, but contains, we hope, some of the answers to the many questions that come to us hourly by the internet, letter or in the field.

All the engines appearing in the 40 titles of the Railway Series - note it has never officially been the 'Thomas' series - are described here, and any page numbers quoted apply to the original edition of the books concerned. The antecedents of characters developed by television/film interests in the years after 1984 are not known to this writer and are perhaps better left to some later historian. Some of the most frequent questions are: "Which story does so and so first appear in?" and "Where can I find the story of (say) Percy and the Scarf?" A large part of this work is aimed specifically to satisfy the where, what and how of these questions: it should be read not as a substitute but complementary to the earlier volume and we sincerely hope will prove a worthy successor and addition to it.

## The Island and its Railways

### *The development of the Island*

The Island of Sodor was not entirely a figment of my father's imagination. During the early 1950s he had been getting a great deal of correspondence from various people - not just children - who wanted to know where, for instance, Henry's tunnel was, or the location of Thomas's branch line. He began to feel that he needed somewhere concrete, as it were, at which to fix them, but searches by both he and his brother found nowhere (other than some totally unsuitable and virtually uninhabited wastes in the north of Scotland) which did not already possess railways. This, of course, was before the Beeching Report appeared and was implemented - they would have a much easier task now!

As Secretary of the Ely Diocesan Sunday School Council he was invited, in 1951, to preach at a Sunday School festival service at Douglas, on the Isle of Man. While there he became aware of the proper name of the See - the Bishopric of Sodor and Man, and during the flight back to Manchester airport, so he told us, it occurred to him that if he were to drop an island into the sea between the English mainland and the Isle of Man he could, at a stroke, not only use it as the basis for his railway system, but give the Bishop of Sodor and Man the other half of his Diocese back. Let me at this stage hasten to point out that there is, in fact, a genuine historical reason for the name, and this is dealt with in the Frequently Asked Questions section - see below.

So the Island of Sodor was born, and cartographers among our readers will find that it comprises, in fact, a westward extension of Walney Island, off the Cumbrian coast at Barrow, even including the community of Vickerstown thereon - though we in Sodor spell it Vicarstown. The map on the cover of this book - and shown on the fold-out map inside the back cover - was painted to set Sodor in its Ordnance Survey context, and we are greatly indebted to its artist, Peter Edwards, for his willing permission to use it.

My father and his brother now began to put various bits of the jigsaw together. George, who was at the time the Librarian at the National Liberal Club in London, had ideal opportunities for historical and other research and it was he who supplied much of the detail, while father himself took on the 'literary' side of the task. Many items of various sorts came together: history, much of it based on Manx or Norse records, geography and, of course, the railways themselves. All were carefully annotated and nothing was proposed that did not have the appropriate causality - the same meticulous methodology, in fact, that was being put into the stories themselves.

The snag about this type of approach, of course, is that parameters become limited, and this has led to some bizarre TV stories which do not wish to be restricted in this way - coal trains, for example, emanating from an Island which has no coal mines, a canal where there has never been a need for one and elaborate dockside craneage at a port which would have nothing like the amount of business to warrant it. It can, and has, been argued that a child does not appreciate such niceties, but for one who had made such a point of authenticity and truth in his tales, such flights of fancy left a bitter taste.

### ***The Railways of the Island***

The railways of the Island of Sodor were, as my father envisaged them, accurate in both history and railway regulations, and logical in their situation. The earliest standard gauge railway on the Island was the Sodor & Mainland Railway, built to link the Island with mainland Britain - it was not a successful venture and by 1901 all its locomotives (there had been only three of them anyway) had been scrapped, though the Company itself remained dormant. The Tidmouth, Knapford & Elsbridge Railway was begun in 1883 and became renamed as a Light Railway in 1908, when an extension to Tidmouth was finally made and steam superseded horse power as the motive force. A W Dry was the contractor who built the line, and his young assistant was a Mr Topham Hatt.

The Wellsworth & Suddery Railway, a coastal line between Suddery and Brendam, was opened in 1870, but in 1908 the harbour at Suddery failed and the Company threw in its lot with the TK&ELR to reach the port of Tidmouth. A joint committee worked the lines from 1912, but in 1914 all three standard gauge lines were amalgamated as the North Western Railway when concerns were felt against possible danger from Ireland, the line being seen as a strategic coastal defence.

The branch line from Kilddane to Peel Godred was built by the NWR as a light railway in 1923, and some of its gradients are therefore heavy. It was agreed that it would be worked by electric traction, and a passenger service is maintained using multiple units. Freight to and from the Aluminium Works at Peel Godred is heavy and locomotives similar to Class 86 and 87 are used. There has been talk of electrifying the remainder of the route across the Island to Barrow but since a change of locomotive would be necessary there anyway - or at least until the route from Carnforth to Barrow is also electrified ("Fat chance!" do I hear you say?) - The Fat Controller has shelved the plan.

The oldest railway on the Island is the Skarloey Railway, which began as a 2ft 3in gauge horse tramway in 1806 run by the Crovan's Gate Mining Company. It ran to mines on Ward Fell which yielded copper. In 1865/6 the line was converted for steam traction, and two locomotives, *Skarloey* and *Rheneas* (the correct and official pronunciation of this name uses a

short first syllable, on which the principle emphasis should be placed) were delivered. The line was successful for a while but after the mines closed in the 1940s and up to 1966, things were difficult. Now, however, run primarily as a tourist line, the Skarloey Railway is busier than it has ever been and keeps its eight locomotives well employed.

The Culdee Fell Railway, a 2ft 7.5in rack railway up the mountain after which it is named, opened in 1900 and is eight miles long. It runs for tourists during the summer months. The Mid Sodor Railway is actually older, having been opened in 1880 between the sea at Arlesburgh (pronounced Arlsburg) and mines at Peel Godred. The previous volume is a little coy about what sort of mines these actually were; slate was in fact the predominant commodity but there was some business in general goods also. In 1946 the last of the slate mines became worked out and the line closed. Like the Skarloey, the Mid Sodor Railway was also gauged at 2ft 3in. Twenty years later the trackbed for ten miles inland from Arlesburgh was relaid with a railway of 15-inch gauge, partly to cater for a growing tourist industry and partly to serve granite quarries at Marthwaite. The stone from the quarry has particularly notable 'weedfree' qualities, and The Fat Controller uses it as railway ballast. This 15-inch gauge line is now known as the Arlesdale Railway.

### ***Locomotives and other characters***

#### ***Standard gauge***

The only locomotive from the early companies to be illustrated in the books is *Neil*, a survivor from the Sodor & Mainland Railway. He makes a very brief appearance in *Very Old Engines*, (p.11) and is a typical contractors' engine of the period - the story takes place in 1865 - but it is hard to say which factory he might have come from. The SMR was a Company whose attitude to records could be described as casual, and details of Neil's acquisition have, sadly, been lost.

A number of engines survive from the North Western period and later. In number order they are:-

#### ***Thomas (1)***

As with Neil, the record as to how he reached the Island is uncertain. He is one of the Billinton-designed 0-6-0 tank engines, Class E2, of the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway, one of a half dozen or so which were fitted with an extension at the front end of the watertanks for dockside working at Southampton. Southampton or not, Thomas seems to have arrived rather mysteriously in 1915 - perhaps it was a wartime mix-up - and, so the story goes, by 1920 both his driver and fireman had married local girls and didn't much want to go back to the south coast of England. The Fat Controller bought Thomas for a nominal sum, and after a spell as shed-pilot at



Vicarstown, he came to Wellsworth, where, in his rescue of James (see *Thomas the Tank Engine*, below) he proved himself to be a Really Useful Engine. His reward was to be put in charge of the Ffarquhar branch, which runs to that village from a junction at Knapford. Various Thomas look-alikes can be found on our 'heritage' railways, but none is identical - the last of the original engines was cut up in the 1950s.

#### Edward (2)

Edward's journey to Sodor was shorter than Thomas's, but they seem to have arrived at about the same time. He is a 4-4-0 of the 'Large Seagull' class introduced on the Furness Railway, which ran the Cumbrian Coast line, in 1896. Some say he came over the bridge from Barrow on official business but couldn't somehow find his way back again, but the official story is that he was borrowed during a locomotive crisis and later bought, like Thomas, for a 'nominal sum'. He has been extensively modified while on the Island, and the theory that in the old days he had difficulty making steam is certainly not true now. He is in charge of the Brendam branch, which runs from a junction at Wellsworth, often described in the stories as 'Edward's station'. None of Edward's original Class have survived.

#### Henry (3)

There have actually been, in effect, two Henrys - for the story of why this is please see the Frequently Asked Question section, under 'Engines'. Suffice here to say that since Henry's return from Crewe he has been, to use my father's expression, "a reformed character". He now looks very much like a Stanier Class 5, of which several examples can be seen at preserved lines up and down the country. It is the current Fat Controller's hope that the Works at Crovan's Gate may yet be able to tap into what could be a lucrative market for the supply of spares for these heritage line locomotives.

#### Gordon (4)

Gordon is sometimes compared with that most famous of all Gresley 'Pacifics', No.4472 *Flying Scotsman*. In fact a true likeness is now pretty loose, but according to notes my father made when talking to Sodor railwaymen, Gordon stems from a prototype, experimental engine built in 1922 when Gresley was projecting his new Class A1 (as they were then) 4-6-2s for the Great Northern Railway. The prototype was never used in traffic by that Company, was set aside when the production run began and then, in 1923,

was sold to the North Western Railway along with a spare boiler. Which is where his similarity to *Flying Scotsman* ceases, because in 1939, during the course of a heavy overhaul at Crewe, his conjugated valve gear, as originally fitted by Gresley, was removed and a two-cylinder chassis of The Fat Controller's own devising substituted.

#### James (5)

In 1912/13 George Hughes of the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway built a class of 0-6-0 tender engines for general mixed-traffic use. It was found that when running at speed, as they had of course to do on passenger duties, they became nose-heavy. Hughes experimented by providing one of the engines with a pony-truck, but the experiment was not a success: in 1923 the LMS sold the engine to the North Western Railway. Crovan's Gate has solved many of the engine's inherited problems, including replacing the wooden brake-blocks with which James had been originally fitted - ref: *Thomas the Tank Engine*, p60. No locomotives of James's type survive.

#### Percy (6)

The Fat Controller needed a shunting engine (ref: *Troublesome Engines* p40) and bought an appealing hybrid from a factory on the Mainland. Percy defies certain identification, and it sometimes appears that he was put together by using any appropriate parts that came to hand - components from both Avonside of Bristol and Hunslet of Leeds are among the commonest but by no means exclusively. It is probably the former of these two major concerns that can claim most responsibility. After purchase Percy saw service first in the yard at Tidmouth, then assisting with the construction of the harbour near Knapford Junction. He is now in charge of freight traffic on the Ffarquhar branch. Several Percy look-alikes can be found on preserved railways but none is identical.

#### Toby (7)

Toby is a 0-6-0 'tram' engine of Great Eastern Railway origin. The present Fat Controller met him, as a boy, while on holiday in East Anglia in 1951 (ref: *Toby the Tram Engine* p8) and his grandfather was later able to purchase him for use on the Ffarquhar quarry branch when Toby's line in East Anglia was closed (ref: *Toby the Tram Engine* p34). My father has explained that he was probably No.68221 originally, one of a batch of three J70 class locomotives built in 1914. His small



watertank has been a source of embarrassment on more than one occasion, but used in the normal way he has proved himself invaluable. He brought with him from East Anglia Henrietta, a 4 wheeled coach (see below). There are no genuine survivors of this locomotive class.

#### **Duck (8)**

Duck makes his first appearance in *Percy the Small Engine* (ref: p20), when he is acquired to take charge of Tidmouth yard. Although his official number is 8 this is not used on the railway: Sir Topham Hatt 1 had served an engineering apprenticeship at Swindon, and when Duck arrived in 1955 he showed his Great Western sympathies by permitting Duck to retain his cast GWR-type numberplates. The number shown is 5741, though my father has stipulated that this might not, in fact, be the number with which he was allocated when built in 1929 to a design by C B Collett. Duck - whose real name, incidentally, is Montague - has proved himself a valued member of the loco-stud, and in recognition of this, when The Fat Controller re-opened the Arlesburgh branch in 1967, he put Duck in charge. It is a responsibility which Duck takes very seriously. Several of Duck's relations can be found on preservation sites through the country.

#### **Donald (9)/ Douglas (10)**

Identical ex-Caledonian Railway 0-6-0 tender-engines of MacIntosh's '812' Class arrived on the Island of Sodor in 1960. Sir Topham had, in fact, ordered only one, No.57646, but, anxious not to be separated from his brother, No.57647 came along too: it is thought - unofficially, of course - that their crews, (who were related) deliberately confused the paperwork so that no-one could tell which was which - ref: *The Twin Engines* p8 and following. The upshot was that Sir Topham accepted both, named them Donald and Douglas respectively, and to show that they really belonged, gave them a blue livery instead of the BR black in which they had arrived. They have taken charge of freight working on the Island and transformed it, and the Fat Controller considers them one of his better bargains. One example remains of this class and can normally be seen working on the Speyside Railway, at Aviemore in Scotland.

#### **Oliver (11)**

Like Duck, Oliver is allowed to wear his Great Western number, 1436, though, again like Duck, there is some doubt as to whether this is original. Also like Duck, he is to a design by C B Collett, a 0-4-2 tank engine intended for branch line passenger duties, but three years younger having been introduced in 1932. In 1967 his crew, alarmed that Oliver's branch line in the West Country was about to be closed, plotted to escape to the Island of Sodor, along with an auto-coach called Isabel and a Great Western brake van called Toad. Douglas comes across them in Barrow yard and the two crews colluded to smuggle the fugitives across to the Island. After an extensive overhaul, Oliver was put to work on Duck's branch line and the two Great Western locomotives now work happily together.

#### **Philippa/Emma**

These two engines are included in this list because it is The Fat Controller's intention, now that the Other Railway has been overtaken by Privatisation, to purchase them with a view to giving Suddrians a faster London service, doing a complete round trip every day, something barely attainable hitherto. They are the twin power cars of a High Speed Train (HST for short) and first appeared as casualties in *Gordon the High Speed Engine* (pp50-56) in 1987. As a single unit they are necessarily somewhat restricted in their use, but Sir Topham Hatt considers this a price worth paying for the services they can offer, and he is confident that, as he says, "they can deliver".

#### **Daisy (D1)**

Daisy is a Metro-Cammell Diesel Mechanical single car unit. Having been built specifically to help on the Ffarquhar branch, she was extremely cocky when she arrived in 1960 - see *Branch Line Engines* - but after a while realised that she was supposed to be part of a team, and sobered down considerably, to everyone's benefit. She still thinks her ideas are better than most other people's, but now is a little more cautious about saying so!

#### **Boco (D2)**

Boco is one of the Metropolitan Vickers Diesel Electric Type 2 locomotives introduced to BR in 1958, having a two-axled bogie (Bo) at one end and a three-axled bogie (Co) at the other. During its British Railways life this was not a greatly successful type: the engines worked mainly in the Barrow area, and the Fat Controller, seeing them, decided what he thought was



wrong with them and worked out how he might put it right. He did, and Boco has fully justified his confidence. He is used on all sorts of duties and is truly, as The Fat Controller remarks in *James and the Diesel Engines* (p8), a 'versatile' engine. One of the class (D5705) has survived and is awaiting restoration at the Peak Railway in Derbyshire.

#### **Bear (D3)**

Bear is an ex-BR Western Region Diesel Hydraulic BoBo locomotive, of a type often described as 'Hymeks'. His BR number was 7101, and the Fat Controller acquired him, on approval, in 1967 along with a 'Peak' Type 4, D199 - the Hymek was retained and because of his growl, was nicknamed 'Bear' by the other engines. Like Boco he has proved a worthwhile acquisition.

#### **Mavis**

Though Mavis is not strictly owned by the North Western Railway, this seems the logical place to include a note about her. She is a Drewry Class 04 0-4-0 diesel shunter who actually belongs to the Ffarquhar Quarry Company. Her basic work is up in the quarry, but (ref: *Tramway Engines* p56) she managed to get an agreement to go down to Ffarquhar station occasionally, an arrangement which undoubtedly suits both parties. Like Daisy, she has her own ideas about things (particularly trucks) and the two of them like nothing better than the chance for a good gossip. Several locomotives of this type have been preserved.

#### **Bill/Ben**

Again, these two engines are not part of The Fat Controller's 'family' but it would be unforgivable to leave them out: they are actually owned by the Sodor China Clay, the Company which extracts that commodity from pits about seven miles from Brendam. They work between the pits and the harbour at Brendam and are 0-4-0 saddle-tank engines with specially cut-down cabs so that they can work through low bridges on their route. Both their prototypes have been preserved - *Judy* can be seen in a Museum in St.Austell and *Alfred* at the Bodmin Steam Railway.

### **Visitors**

#### **City of Truro**

*City of Truro* visited from the National Railway Museum on a railtour (ref: Duck and the Diesel Engine p6 et seq) very much to Duck's delight - he talked Great Western for days afterwards and all the other engines became heartily sick of it! *City of Truro* may be found at the National Railway Museum unless engaged on railtour duties.

#### **Flying Scotsman**

The Fat Controller arranged for a visit from *Flying Scotsman* - then privately owned - as a treat for Gordon, who had become very depressed at the state of things he was hearing about and seeing on the Other Railway. *Flying Scotsman*, at the time the story was written, had two tenders, which sparked off a certain amount of needless jealousy in Henry - ref: *Enterprising Engines*, p12. *Flying Scotsman* may now be found at the National Railway Museum unless engaged on railtour duties.

#### **Stepney**

*Stepney* was a visitor for Thomas from the Bluebell Railway. He thoroughly enjoyed his stay on the Island, during which time he worked on Thomas's branch line, and one gets the feeling that it was only the thought of his responsibilities at Sheffield Park that finally dragged him back home. The Bluebell Railway in Sussex is where he can regularly be found.

#### **Wilbert**

*Wilbert* was a rather different visitor. He is an Austerity 0-6-0 saddle-tank: the Fat Controller felt he needed an engine which was small but powerful to give extra assistance on the Arlesburgh branch (or indeed elsewhere) at busy times and he persuaded the Dean Forest Railway to lend him *Wilbert* for trial. *Wilbert* spent some time on the Island and, like *Stepney*, thoroughly enjoyed it, before returning to his home in the Forest. He is currently (2005) undergoing an extensive overhaul.

#### **Old Stuck-up**

This is, in fact, a nickname given to a visiting Class 40 diesel (No.40125) in 1984, when the visitor made himself very unpleasant. I think it can be safely said that, unlike the others, he did **not** enjoy his visit to the Island of Sodor, but he had no-one other than himself to blame.



Diesel

Diesel ('Evil Diesel' is a publisher's invention not used in the Railway Series) was, the Fat Controller later acknowledged, not one of his better ideas. He had borrowed a Class 08 0-6-0 shunter (ref: *Duck and the Diesel Engine* p20 et seq) to help in the yard: though welcomed at first he soon made himself unpopular. To get his own back on Duck he made up insulting stories and blamed Duck for them - fortunately the Fat Controller was wise to this and sent him away in disgrace.

### **Narrow gauge**

#### **Skarloey Railway - 2 feet 3 inches**

Taken in number order, the engines are:-

##### **Skarloey (1)**

Built in 1865 at the same time as the Talyllyn Railway's No.1 at Fletcher Jennings, Whitehaven, and delivered to the new railway in the following year. The engine arrived cabless as a 0-4-0 saddletank, but after he had precipitated the Manager into a bush on Opening Day (ref: *Very Old Engines*, p26), was given not only an extra pair of wheels to make him a 0-4-2, but a cab as well. A heavy repair was undertaken at Whitehaven in 1897, but nothing further was done and by 1945 he was fit only for steam in extreme emergency - as indeed happened in 1952 - see Old Faithful (*Four Little Engines* p50 and following). Subsequent overhauls in 1958 and 1985 have rejuvenated him.

##### **Rheneas (2)**

A 0-4-0 well-tank engine, built by Fletcher Jennings to the same design as the Talyllyn's No.2 in 1866. Also delivered cabless he was less used after *Skarloey* acquired his, and also because his long wheelbase was being rather hard on the track. Like *Dolgoch* on the Talyllyn Railway he enjoys 'peculiar motion' which has not made life any easier for the workshop staff. *Rheneas* was overhauled at Crovan's Gate in 1937 and 1943 and in *Skarloey's* extremity became the mainstay of the railway. A heavy overhaul in England in 1961 put him back into fettle, and the works at Crovan's Gate has recently (2002) carried out another overhaul.

##### **Sir Handel (3)**

Built for the Mid Sodor Railway by the Falcon Works in Loughborough and, as a 0-4-0 saddletank engine, delivered by sea to Arlesburgh in 1904 to replace a scrapped engine - the MSR gave him blue paint and

named him *Falcon*. In 1910 he was sent back to Loughborough, where the addition of a pair of trailing wheels made him a 0-4-2 and much steadier. With No.4 he was sold to the Sodor Aluminium Company on the closure of the MSR and in 1950 bought by the Skarloey Railway, which named him *Sir Handel* after Sir Handel Brown - see People. Wider wheeltracks were provided to cure a propensity for falling between the rails, and he spent the years 1982/4 on loan to the Talyllyn.

##### **Peter Sam (4)**

Built in 1920 and delivered by rail to Cronk, *Peter Sam* is a 0-4-2 saddletank to his builder's (Kerr, Stuart) standard industrial pattern. He too was built for the Mid Sodor Railway, where his livery was green and, following the pattern of the MSR's naming their engines after their builders, he became *Stuart*. Like *Sir Handel* he came to the Skarloey by way of the Sodor Aluminium Company, and was named after Peter Sam the Thin Controller. An accident in 1961 (ref: *Gallant Old Engine*, p8) allowed an experiment - also carried out on the Talyllyn - with a Giesl ejector, though, unlike the Talyllyn example on *Edward Thomas*, his is still in use. He spent much of the 1990s on loan to the Talyllyn. A similar locomotive has recently been built for the Corris Railway in Mid-Wales.

##### **Rusty (5)**

The Skarloey Railway's 'man of all work'. *Rusty* is a 0-4-0 diesel/mechanical engine bought from Ruston & Hornsby - hence the name - of Lincoln in 1957. He is used for maintenance work and as motive power in a case of emergency or breakdown.

##### **Duncan (6)**

*Duncan* came to the Skarloey Railway second-hand through Sir Handel Brown in 1958 - he is a well-tank, built by the Kilmarnock firm of Andrew Barclay in 1928. Increasing traffic was proving too much for the two ex-MSR locomotives to cope with and *Duncan* was brought in to help. Coming from an industrial background he is, as he has been known to say "...a plain, blunt engine," and he is inclined to feel aggrieved about very little at times, but his heart is in the right place. Like *Sir Handel* and *Peter Sam* he has enjoyed a spell at the Talyllyn Railway, where he may be seen in 2005.



### **Ivo Hugh (7)**

A powerful 0-4-2 locomotive who made his debut in 1996 and has done sterling work for the railway ever since. The heavier work was done at the Fat Controller's works in Crovan's Gate, but he was actually constructed by the Skarloey Railway's own engineering department. His similarity to the Talyllyn Railway's No.7 is explained by the fact that much expertise was passed on by that Company in the light of experience with its own engine, *Tom Rolt*, and the co-operation saved much heart-searching at Crovan's Gate. *Ivo Hugh* is unique in the Skarloey roster as being a side-tank engine, and he is strong enough to handle the heaviest work.

### **Duke (8)**

*Duke* also came from the Mid Sodor Railway, having first arrived there for its opening in 1880. He was built at Boston Lodge by the Festiniog Railway for the Earl of Sodor, and is a 0-4-0 tender/saddletank engine to a design of George England, of which *Prince* is an example still at work on the Festiniog Railway. In traffic until the MSR closed in 1947 he was sheeted up in Arlesdale shed until discovered in 1969 by the Fat Clergyman - see *Sleeping Beauty* (ref: *Duke the Lost Engine*, p50). He was overhauled at Crovan's Gate and now runs in his official MSR brown livery.

### **Fred (9)**

This locomotive has so far had only a passing mention, in Story 1 of *New Little Engine* (Bk 40). He is a Hunslet 0-4-0 diesel engine built for work in mines and came to the Skarloey Railway in 1989 from the National Coal Board as a back-up for *Rusty*. The Skarloey bought two engines and made one good one out of the pair; Fred is the result. With a maximum speed of under 9mph he is used exclusively for engineering work.

### **Arlesdale Railway - 15 inches**

(NB - similar engines to all of these can be found at the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway in Cumbria)

### **Bert**

Bert is a 0-8-2 tender engine, who was rebuilt from an earlier 0-8-0 by the Yorkshire Engine Company, and his running gear is not dissimilar to locomotives used by Sir Arthur Heywood on his Duffield Bank Railway. In an attempt for counter poor steaming a pair of trailing wheels was added so that a larger firebox could be inserted, but the problem was not solved until 1973

when a Kylchap blastpipe and longer chimney were fitted. His livery is blue, lined with red. His equivalent at Ravenglass is *River Irt*.

### **Jock**

Jock is a 2-6-2 tender engine built, apart from boiler, firebox and cylinders, at Arlesburgh in 1976, having also been designed 'in house' by Ivan Ferrier the line's CME, working with Ian Smith of the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway. The design includes the best features of the other three steam engines on the railway. His livery, a pale yellowish green lined with dark red, reminded *Douglas* of the Highland Railway locomotives he had known during his Scottish days; the name Jock was suggested by him and stuck (ref: *Jock the New Engine*, p44). Jock's alter ego in Cumbria is *Northern Rock*.

### **Mike**

Also a 2-6-2 tender engine who was constructed by Clarkson's of York. The design attempted to improve on the Ravenglass line's *River Esk*, and, like their own *River Mite*, appears to have succeeded, for he is a tough and strong locomotive. Though thoroughly reliable on the whole he nevertheless, like most of us, has his moments! His livery is red with blue lining.

### **Rex**

Rex is a 2-8-2 tender engine. He is based on a Henry Greenly design and was built by Davey Paxman in Colchester in 1923, at the same time as *River Esk* was being built for the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway. The engines' lives seem to have run in parallel, for by a remarkable coincidence he went to the Yorkshire Engine Company for a rebuild at the same time as did *River Esk*. The fitting of Walschaert's valve gear solved the problems of both, and although Rex has a penchant for slipping except on light loads he has proved himself, in The Fat Controller's phrase, a Really Useful Engine. He has a green livery with red lining.

### **Frank**

A shunter, painted grey and red, Frank is used for maintenance work and empty carriage movements. He was constructed at Arlesdale out of bits and pieces from other engines, and made his debut in 1990. He is powered by a Perkins diesel engine and is named after the founder of that firm, *Perkins* in Ravenglass, Frank in Arlesdale.



### **Culdee Fell Railway - 2ft 7.5in**

(Though the Culdee Fell Railway has close affinities with the Snowdon Mountain Railway in North Wales, I do not believe that my father intended any of the engines listed below to be specifically associated with any of the SMR locomotives)

- Godred (1)** Numbers 1-5 were built at Winterthur in Switzerland in 1900, and work on the Abt rack system, pinion wheels below the engine engaging with a fixed 'rack' of teeth set between the rails. Godred was the ill-fated engine which had the misfortune to become derailed on opening day - perhaps by a stone lodged in the 'rack'. He was so badly damaged that he was scrapped and never replaced.
- Ernest (2) and Wilfred (3)** These two engines were delivered in 1900 but by the time of *Mountain Engines* (Bk 19, 1964) had been superseded by Numbers 6, 7 and 8, and do not appear in the stories.
- Culdee (4)** Culdee, on the way back from overhaul in Switzerland, halts near the Skarloey Railway shed and acts as the narrator for the stories in the book, in some of which he is involved himself.
- Shane Dooiney (5)** The last of the first batch of engines. Shane Dooiney is not mentioned in the stories of *Mountain Engines* because at the time of them he was away in Switzerland under overhaul. His was the last overhaul to be carried out there - now the mountain engines make the much less expensive trip to The Fat Controller's works at Crovan's Gate when their overhauls become due.
- Lord Harry (6)** Lord Harry reached the railway in March 1962, but his behaviour to begin with was not good. As a result he was suspended from passenger work (ref: *Mountain Engines*, p42) but later redeemed himself with a gallant rescue in appalling weather (ref: *Mountain Engines* p48-55) He was renamed Patrick at the request of the young man he had rescued, and re-instated (ref: *Mountain Engines* p56/7).
- Alaric (7) and Eric (8)** These two engines, with Lord Harry, are superheated engines of a more modern design - they arrived in the May and July of 1962 respectively, but are mentioned only in passing and take no part in the *Mountain Engines* stories.

### **Other railway characters**

- Annie/Clarabel** These are Thomas's two elderly bogie coaches, given to him for his branch line as a reward for proving himself a Really Useful Engine - ref: *Thomas the Tank Engine*, p62. Annie can take only passengers, but Clarabel can take "...passengers, luggage and the Guard." They are frequently concerned by Thomas's behaviour, but for all that think the world of him and would stick by him through thick and thin.
- Henrietta** Henrietta is Toby's coach. When The Fat Controller invited Toby to the Island he omitted to mention her but Toby brought her just the same and she was made very welcome - after all, the alternative so far as she was concerned was a stationmaster's hen-house and that would never have done! Henrietta is actually a four-wheeler, but a very similar ex-Wisbech & Upwell Tramway bogie coach has recently been restored and can be found on the North Norfolk Railway.
- Scruffey** A Private Owner wagon, actually the property of S C Ruffey, and like many such wagons, not kept in the best state of maintenance. Unfortunately he makes the mistake of trying to throw his importance about, and an idea suggested by Toad - see below - means that his bragging comes all too literally apart. One is left with the feeling that the Fat Controller, for all his expressed regret, is neither greatly dismayed nor surprised - see *Oliver the Western Engine*, below.
- Toad** A certain type of Great Western brake-van was classified 'Toad' and it is one of these that Oliver is able to liberate to the Island of Sodor along with himself and Isabel - see below. Toad is very protective of Oliver and tries to prevent his falling into error, but also suggests the means by which Scruffey's come-uppance may be achieved.
- Isabel** A Great Western auto-coach brought over to the Island with Oliver - she has acquired her name because, as Oliver explains, "...there is a bell on her." Along with Dulcie - see below - her duty is the carriage of passengers along what is officially the Arlesburgh branch but is generally known as 'Duck's Branch line'.





<b>Dulcie</b>	When the Fat Controller re-opened the Arlesburgh branch he already had plans for the passenger traffic and was making plans to acquire an auto-coach - this turned out to be Dulcie. The arrival of Isabel to augment the stock, with Oliver, could not have been better timed.
<b>Ruth/Jemima/Lucy</b>	Four-wheeled carriages built by Brown Marshall in 1866 for the Skarloey Railway at the same time as they were building a similar batch for the Talyllyn Railway - which accounts for the marked similarity between the early rolling stock of the two railways. Their equivalents on the Talyllyn are carriages No 1, 2 and 3.
<b>Agnes</b>	A four-wheeled 3rd class carriage by the Birmingham Carriage Company, who built two examples in 1866 for the 2ft 3in gauge. One went to Wales, the other to the island of Sodor. The Talyllyn example is No.4.
<b>Beatrice</b>	The Talyllyn van (No.5) by Brown Marshall was thought to be unique until it was discovered that there was another such vehicle, Beatrice, on the Island of Sodor. As with Ruth, Jemima and Lucy, Beatrice was built as part of the same order, and reached the Skarloey Railway at the same time as her sisters.
<b>Ada/Jane/Mabel</b>	Open four-wheeled carriages acquired as a stop-gap when carriage stock was short and now converted into covered stock. They have so far made few appearances in the saga, the most notable being during the television story in <i>The Little Old Engine</i> - see below.
<b>Cora</b>	A small four-wheeled van acquired by The Thin Controller for the Skarloey Railway from the sale after the Mid Sodor Railway was closed. She was used as a Guard's Van at first, but after Millicent's arrival has returned to her original use as a tool van.
<b>Gertrude/Millicent</b>	Bogie-coaches rescued from the Mid Sodor Railway and restored for use on the Skarloey. Millicent has a Guard's compartment, which has allowed Cora to revert to her original use.
<b>Catherine</b>	Culdee's coach on the Culdee Fell Railway, the only named example in the stories of nine 56-seater saloons.

## Non-railway Characters

<b>Bertie</b>	This red, single-decker bus makes his debut as an unidentified bus in <i>Thomas, Terence and the Snow</i> - ref: <i>Tank Engine Thomas Again</i> , p46. He is named in the next story and makes intermittent appearances thereafter throughout the Series. He is a good-hearted, helpful and popular character.
<b>Bulgy</b>	A complete contrast to Bertie, the only thing they have in common being their colour. Bulgy, who appears in one story only - see <i>Oliver the Western Engine</i> , below - is a revolutionary double-decker bus who steals the engines' passengers but ends up as a henhouse after becoming trapped under a bridge. Poetic justice, really!
<b>Bulstrode</b>	No less unpleasant, but a sea-going barge rather than a bus. He too makes only the single appearance (quite enough really, you might say) and ends up, literally, on the beach. His one saving grace is that he came as a blessing in disguise to an author desperate for a story at short notice.
<b>Caroline</b>	A veteran car who also takes part in only one story - see <i>Stepney the Bluebell Engine</i> , below - but her contribution to that story is, of course, a valuable and entertaining one.
<b>Harold</b>	Harold, though never intended to be a major character - see <i>Percy the Small Engine</i> , below - has nevertheless turned into one to the extent that I was asked specifically to include him in two of the stories I wrote in the 1980s for the TV series. One of these became <i>Thomas and the Missing Christmas Tree</i> (now out of print) and the other appears in <i>Thomas Comes Home</i> - see below.
<b>Terence</b>	The orange tractor made his debut in <i>Thomas the Tank Engine</i> and has figured in a number of other stories since. Like Harold he has become a well-loved character.
<b>Trevor</b>	Rescued from a scrapyard in <i>Edward the Blue Engine</i> , when he is bought by the Vicar of Wellsworth (see <i>People</i> ), Trevor too has featured in several stories since. One would be hard put to it to decide who might win a popularity poll between Trevor, Terence and Bertie!

## Characters in the Stories

### *Sir Topham Hatt (1) (1880-1956)*

This gentleman is first mentioned in *The Sad Story of Henry* (The Three Railway Engines, p40) when he appears as the Fat Director. Various suggestions have been made for the original basis of the character and all are wrong: my father had not even met the two main suggestions - Horace May of the Bluebell Railway and the Rev'd Teddy Boston - when the story was created in 1942. He is, in fact, based on no-one in particular, though it is possible that my doctor at the time the story was created made an unconscious contribution. My father wanted to create a benevolent being who was 'in charge'. My doctor, so far as I was concerned, was 'in charge' of me at the time and it may be that he was of portly aspect. I don't know, and I was never even aware of his name, but perhaps an association of ideas evolved in my father's mind.

My father, perhaps warming to the idea, gives the Fat Director a larger role in *Thomas the Tank Engine*. In 1948, the year in which the third book, *James the Red Engine*, was published our railways became Nationalised as British Railways and Company Directors became, at least so far as railways were concerned, beings of the past. Regional Controllers came in - the North Western Railway, now Region, and the Fat Director, though nominally Nationalised along with the rest were actually permitted to go on in pretty much their old way, and things did not change a great deal, apart from The Fat Director's title being changed to that of The Fat Controller. He became more generally known as Sir Topham Hatt (his actual name) in 1984 with the introduction of the TV series: see also FAQ section, TV/Video.

Sir Topham Hatt was, as plain Mr Topham Hatt, the Engineer in charge of the construction of the Tidmouth, Knapford & Elsbridge Light Railway. When the job was finished he was made a Director of the Company, and after the Wellsworth & Suddery Railway was linked with the original line at Knapford, was elected a Director of that Company too, the role in which he first appears - see above. He was created a baronet for his services to the railways of Sodor in 1948. He married Jane, sister of Mr (later Sir) Handel Brown, and retired in 1954 in favour of his son, Charles, whom the Board had had no hesitation in electing as his successor.

### *Sir Topham Hatt (2) (1914-1997)*

Actually, of course, Sir Charles Topham Hatt. He was The Fat Controller from 1954 to 1984, when he retired in favour of his own son - see below. During his period of office he began improvements to the harbour at Knapford, planned by his father, and re-opened the Arlesburgh branch in 1965/6, being responsible for the construction of the Arlesdale Railway

and for establishing the ballast consortium which uses it. He married Amanda Croarie in 1940 and they had two children - Stephen Topham (the current Fat Controller) born in 1941 and Bridget, who was born in 1943. Charles inherited his father's baronetcy in 1956 and died thirteen years after his own retirement.

### *Sir Topham Hatt (3) (b1941)*

Sir Stephen Topham Hatt is mentioned with his sister Bridget in *Toby the Tram Engine*, pp8/15, while on a family holiday in England with his parents and grandfather, Sir Topham Hatt (1). He became Fat Controller in 1984, succeeding to his father's baronetcy in 1997. In 1970 he had married Helen Margaret, a distant cousin and granddaughter of the Rev'd Nicholas Dreswick, the much-respected historian of the Island of Sodor. They have three children: Richard Topham, born in 1972 and no doubt destined to be Sir Topham Hatt (4) - his father will be 65 in 2006 though he has, as yet, given no hint of an impending retirement - Charles Nicholas (1974) and Emily Helen (1977). He played a part in arranging for the construction of the Arlesdale Railway's new locomotive, Jock, in 1990, a project which had been dear to his father's heart. With great skill he masterminded the arrangements for the royal visit in 1995, when he welcomed the Prince of Wales on his first visit to the Island - ref: *Thomas and the Fat Controller's Engine* pp54/60.

### *Sir Handel Brown (1) (1875-1950)*

He served as Liberal MP for the Sodor East constituency from 1910 to 1929 and again as a National Liberal from 1931 to 1936 - he was created Baronet in 1937 for "Outstanding Public Service". He bought the failing Crovan's Gate Mining Company in 1909, and though the slate quarries served by the Skarloey Railway (both were included in the sale) failed in 1924 he promised to keep them going until his death. When this occurred in 1950 however, they survived against all odds, thanks to Mr Robert Ham, (see below) Sir Handel's Manager. Sir Handel married Dorothy Lloyd in 1920 and their son, Sir Handel Lloyd, born in 1924, is the Owner of the Skarloey Railway referred to in the books.

### *Sir Handel Brown (2) (b1924)*

Sir Handel Lloyd Brown is the only son of Sir Handel and Dorothy Brown and the present 'Owner' of the Skarloey Railway. His home is at The Rowans, near Cros-ny-Cuirm (the ford of the mountain ash) and about five miles north of Crovan's Gate. He succeeded to both title and property in 1950, though he had in fact been administering the holding for some 15 years. In 1951 he married Rachael Qualtrough, a descendant of the family of Lancelot Qualtrough, the last Bishop of Sodor. They have two children, Rebecca Dorothy (born 1954) and Handel Qualtrough, born 1957, who has administered the Estate since 1994 but who will not, we hope, succeed to his father's baronetcy for some years to come.



### **Robert Sam (1881-1971)**

Mr Robert Sam was Sir Handel Brown's General Manager of the Skarloey Railway, having joined the Company at the age of 16 in 1897. He took over as General Manager in 1936 and for some time before Sir Handel (1)'s death in 1950 he ran the railway with the line's Foreman, Mr David Hugh. This continued for a little while after 1950, until Robert stepped down in favour of his son Peter, The Thin Controller (1).

### **The Thin Controller (1) (b1915)**

Mr Peter Sam was born in 1915, the only son of Robert Sam (see above). Having, like his father, spent his entire working life with the Skarloey Railway, he took over from his father as General Manager in 1951: he is the Thin Controller referred to in all stories except those in *Great Little Engines* and *New Little Engine*, having retired in 1980.

### **The Thin Controller (2) (b1948)**

Peter Sam's son Roger, who had been acting as Assistant Manager since 1970, was unanimously accepted by the Skarloey Railway Board as his father's successor, and has continued to foster the links formed by his father with the Talylyn Railway in Wales. He was instrumental in persuading the Board that a new engine was required, and personally suggested its name to honour another employee, Ivo Hugh (see below) and the faithful service that he had given to the railway.

### **Ivo Hugh (Mr Hugh) (b1921)**

Ivo Hugh, the son of David Hugh, Sir Handel Brown (1)'s Foreman, joined the Railway as a Platelayer/Fitter in 1940. His potential was quickly realised, but it was not until his father retired in 1951 that the chance arrived for him to take over as Foreman in his place. He himself retired in 1991, but still lives beside the line and was able in 1996 to christen the new locomotive with his own name, a very closely guarded secret. His son David, born in 1950, followed his father's footsteps both as Fitter on the railway and as Foreman, a post to which he was promoted in 1991. David is the present 'Mr Hugh' in the stories.

### **Mrs Kyndley**

Mrs Kitty Kyndley lives with her husband in a cottage beside Thomas's branch line, just south of the tunnelmouth. She made her debut in the stories when, though ill and confined to bed, she was able to save a train from collision with a landslide by hanging her red dressing gown out of her bedroom window (ref: *Toby the Tram Engine* p52). She has since received several mentions in passing, having recovered from her illness, and though the purist may doubt her longevity (she was middle-aged in 1952!) it is probable that most references concern events occurring around that time. Though now elderly she is still active, however, and still waves to the trains as they pass.

### **Jem Cole**

Jem Cole makes a single appearance - at least by name - in the stories (ref: *Edward the Blue Engine* pp40/44) as the driver of Trevor the Traction Engine before he was bought by the Vicar of Wellsworth (see below), the Rev'd Charles Laxey. Although not specifically stated it can be safely assumed that after the purchase the Vicar continued to recruit Jem's services when a driver for Trevor was required.

### **Tom Tipper**

Tom Tipper is a postman who - so far, at any rate - has made but a single appearance in the stories (ref: *Really Useful Engines*, pp22/32). He has retired from the Post Office now and lives a quiet life with his wife in a cottage near Ffarquhar station.

### **Jeremiah Jobling**

Jeremiah Jobling emerges briefly from obscurity when, under protest, he donates one of his leather bootlaces to the repair of a vacuum pipe - *James the Red Engine*, pp28/30. That task completed he has descended into obscurity once more, wiser, perhaps, than before.

### **The Vicar of Wellsworth (b1920)**

The Rev'd Charles Laxey, a cousin of the late Rev'd Peter Dreswick, Vicar of Arlesburgh. In 1954, when he purchased Trevor the Traction Engine from the Wellsworth scrapyards (*Edward the Blue Engine*, p38/46), he was a youngish man with sons of 8 and 6. His final appearance in the Series was in *Thomas and the Twins* p36/46 and shortly after that he retired with his wife to a cottage on the outskirts of Brendam; it stands near the railway, so he is able to maintain his acquaintanceship with Edward and his crew. The elder of the boys followed his father into Holy Orders and was lucky enough to be offered the living of Wellsworth on his father's retirement, so Trevor still lives at the Vicarage there. Thanks to earlier tuition by Jem Cole (qv), Trevor's current owner has become an able driver and mechanic in his own right. The younger son, after obtaining a First in English at Oxford, joined the publishing firm of Chatter & Windows (still, we are glad to say, unabsorbed into a conglomerate) and has worked his way up to the post of Editorial Manager.

### **The Refreshment Lady (1906-1986)**

The Refreshment Lady continued her work with the Skarloey Railway for some ten years after the incident related in *Four Little Engines*, pp34/48 and then enjoyed 21 years of contented retirement before her death in 1986. Her son-in-law - who was, as a newly-married man, actually the driver of *Peter Sam* on the day in question - is now also retired. He and his wife live near the line in the cottage that the Refreshment Lady left to them in her Will.



### ***The Small Controller (b1936)***

This is actually Mr Francis Duncan who is, strictly speaking, General Manager rather than a Controller. He was appointed when the Arlesdale Railway was opened on the trackbed of the Mid Sodor Railway in 1967, and is now approaching a remarkable 40 years of service to the line. Now nearing 70 he is still hale and hearty ("Good for another decade," he laughingly boasts), but he has let it be known that he intends to retire on achieving that landmark. He has never married, preferring to devote his life entirely to the railway, and it is felt in many quarters that the example set in his service to the line may be a difficult one to follow.

### ***The Fat Clergyman (1924-1986)***

This character really is based on the Rev'd E R ('Teddy') Boston, as anyone who has recognised his portrait in many of the illustrations in *Small Railway Engines* and *Duke the Lost Engine* will know. He and my father met in the late 1940s, and it was a friendship which grew during the next decade, when my father was Vicar of Emneth, just outside Wisbech and Teddy was curate of St. Peter's, Wisbech. Teddy later established the Cadeby Light Railway in his Vicarage there, a project which, for many years, held regular open days on the first Saturday of each month through the summer, though its future is currently (February 2005) in some doubt.

### ***The Thin Clergyman (1911-1997)***

My father personified himself in this character, and took great delight in relating some of the adventures, suitably adapted, that he had shared with 'The Fat Clergyman' on the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway over the years. The one exception is the story of the finding of Duke, which, while based on the fact of an engine's discovery buried in the South American jungle, was nothing like so immediate or painful to the Fat Clergyman as the tale might have us believe.

### ***Nancy (b1953)***

"Nancy is a Guard's daughter." From the stories we actually know no more about her than that, and that she is the recipient of several of Skarloey's reminiscences. In fact her proper name is (or was at the time) Nancy Rushen, and she is distantly related to the Thin Controller (2), for she is the great-granddaughter of Beatrice, one of Mr Robert Sam's sisters. Since the stories were written she has married and gone to live in the Isle of Man with her husband, whom she met while he was working as a volunteer on the Railway. They make the short journey back to Sodor to see their married daughters and the railway as often as they can.

### ***Lizi and Kathy***

These two girls are also Guard's daughters as it happens, but they belong to the Talylyn rather than the Skarloey Railway. Lizi and Kathy Presres (Pr Pressers) live in Tywyn, the headquarters of the Talylyn Railway, and are on a holiday visit to the Island of Sodor when they remind Peter Sam of an incident that occurred while he was in Wales - ref *New Little Engine*, p36.

Signalmen, Stationmasters, Inspectors and other railway officials, far too numerous to mention and sadly neglected as to names, are recorded in the chronicles. They appear, do their duty, pass through and are never heard of again. Without them, of course, the railway could not function, so it is fitting therefore, that they should all have at least a general mention and recognition in these pages.

## Your Frequently Asked Questions Answered

The questions answered below are grouped in five sections for easier reference - Books, Engines, Island of Sodor, Video/TV and General, in that order. The questions themselves do not, however, appear in any particular order within those groups.

### BOOKS

**Q Why can't I buy the whole Railway Series?**

**A** Because the publishers - Egmont Children's Books - have claimed that falling sales make them commercially unviable. But if they aren't there for people to buy in the first place no one can possibly know how viable they are, can they? The complete Series has now been unavailable (at the time of writing - February 2005) for the best (or should that be worst?) part of ten years, and the evidence of my own eyes at bookshops, together with the charity and other sales in which I am involved, suggests that there is actually a wide and eager market for them, which might be tapped to the benefit of everyone. I have a job to keep the few that are available on my sales table, anyway.

**Q Why does the picture on page 9 of *Tank Engine Thomas Again* depict on the left an engine which looks like Gordon when the text refers to Henry?**

**A** At the end of Henry's escapade in the tunnel in *The Three Railway Engines*, the Fat Director asked (ref: *Edward, Gordon and Henry*, p60) if he would like a new coat of paint, and suggested blue and red, to which Henry agreed. "Then," he said, "I shall be like Edward." Unfortunately this made him look exactly like Gordon too, and in this picture the artist made the mistake of giving him square buffers like Gordon's. The error has been a source of confusion to generations of children and parents ever since.

**Q When did the Railway series start?**

**A** In 1942, when the author's son Christopher caught measles - for more information see Introduction.

**Q Where are Gordon's Hill, Henry's Tunnel, Thomas's branch line, etc?**

**A** These are the questions that started the Island of Sodor of in the first place. All these locations can be found on the map that forms the cover of this book.

**Q Who or what persuaded your father to publish the stories?**

**A** It was a 'who' - my mother: see Introduction.

**Q Did your father ever write any stories apart from those to do with Thomas?**

**A** Yes, he wrote two books for older children about a little red three-wheeled car called Belinda, and later told me that he got the idea when driving past the Reliant works on A5, on our trips to Wales. *Belinda the Beetle* and *Belinda Beats the Band* were published in 1958 and 1961 respectively, by the Brockhampton Press, and republished in paperback editions with new illustrations in 1992. Though not a story, he also wrote, in 1951, a book of prayers for children called *Our Child Begins to Pray*.

**Q Is it true that the Railway stories are based on real-life incidents?**

**A** Certainly - for specific examples see the 'Stories' chapter.

**Q How do you find these 'real-life' ideas? Where do they come from?**

**A** My father had an extensive library - which I have inherited from him - and he used to subscribe to various magazines which often had little snippets of odd or unusual stories. Ideas often came from the magazines and books, many of which were written by railwaymen or people who had worked for the railway. Then there were newspapers, and he kept scrapbooks - which again I have - of cuttings and other bits and pieces that his brother or members of the public sent him, odd anecdotes that people told him, and so on. I now keep such things in a PC database instead of a scrapbook, but the principle is the same.

**Q Why are the 'Thomas' books still as popular as ever?**

**A** There have been as many reasons put forward, almost, as there will be people reading these words! So far as the original stories are concerned, length, with the language and its rhythm are perfectly judged and general entertainment values are high. Illustration also plays an important part and children not only identify with the characters easily but begin also to recognise and appreciate behaviour characteristics. From a parent's point of view, reading, number and colour recognition, with other educational elements, are all gently incorporated in to the stories, and for the child it becomes a pleasurable learning process. Grandparents (and more recently, I suspect, some great-grandparents) who have been brought up on the stories know they are buying a quality product when they do so - more often than not they go for the original texts. Whether the same will be true in 50 years' time of the grandparents brought up on current non-authentic texts remains to be seen.

**Q How many/what languages are Thomas stories available in ?**

**A** Those that I know about or have copies of are:- English, Welsh, Gaelic, Japanese, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch - and American.



**Q** Have the stories always had the same illustrator?

**A** For the 40 titles in the Railway Series we have used six illustrators. The first did not meet with Father's approval, while the second, who was much better but drew only *Thomas the Tank Engine*, could not be traced after the Second War. With *James the Red Engine*, C. Reginald Dalby took over. He was inclined to feel that because they were only children's books - and in his view were probably here today and gone tomorrow - accuracy was of little importance, but Father maintained, not unreasonably, that since he had taken trouble to make the texts authentic the pictures ought to be accurate too. Dalby retired after Book 11 (*Percy the Small Engine*, 1956) and his place was taken by John Kenney. Kenney lived in Leicester and drew from life, visiting Leicester Central station in which to do so. He drew Books 12 (*The Eight Famous Engines*, 1957) to 17 (*Very Old Engines*, 1962) inclusive, and then a husband and wife team, Peter and Gunvor Edwards held the reins until the end of Father's series. Peter, again drawing from life, did the mechanical bits while his wife added the backgrounds, and they imbued a new dimension in to the Series. When I took over the writing in 1982 the publishers found Clive Spong for me, who illustrated all of my 14 contributions and several other books as well - Clive has thus actually drawn more of the Railway series than anyone else. I have also worked with an artist named Ken Stott on a number of TV spin-off projects. However, since the advent of the TV Series there is far more work than any one person could cope with and various publishers have recruited other illustrators, some of whom, in my view, come nowhere near previously-set high standards.

**Q** Why did your father put faces on the engines?

**A** Originally to make them seem a little more human to a sick child. After all, if you are telling a story about a talking engine, logic demands that the child has a way of knowing how he does it. But it wasn't in any case, a new idea - toys dating from, I think, the 1870s in the Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI), on the South Bank in London, also have pictures of engines with faces.

**Q** Did your father have it in mind that the stories would be specifically for boys?

**A** Only to the extent that I was a boy and the stories were originally for me. By the time he came to write the next two books (*James the Red Engine* and *Tank Engine Thomas Again*) he had probably realised - and perhaps hoped, as all writers do - that they might have a wider audience: that may be partly why Thomas's coaches were called Annie and Clarabel, but I think his main concept was that they should simply be a female foil for Thomas.

## ENGINES

**Q** Why was Henry given a new shape?

**A** Henry was troublesome. He was not the engine that had been ordered in the first place - the Fat Controller had wanted a Robinson 'Atlantic' (4-4-2) of the Great Central Railway but, so the story goes, was fobbed off with a useless Great Northern Railway locomotive built from plans stolen from Doncaster in 1919. These were for an experimental engine, but were thought to be for the new 'Pacific' type (4-6-2) that Gresley was building at the time. Too late the thief realised his mistake and was delighted to offload his disaster on to the first desperate customer who came along - the Fat Controller. That gentleman remembered it with sorrow for the rest of his days! As chance would have it, in 1951 Henry was derailed in an accident in snow at Killdane (*Henry the Green Engine* p26) and the Fat Controller saw his opportunity. Henry was sent to Crewe for rebuilding and came back a different engine. He has given no further trouble.

**Q** Are the engines named after family, friends, etc?

**A** No. My father, warned perhaps by the experience of Christopher Robin Milne, avoided this. The names he chose, with one or two minor exceptions, were selected to suit - in his own mind - the character he had decided on for the sort of engine he was writing about.

**Q** Was Thomas based on a specific engine?

**A** Not at first - the stories were simply accompaniment to the toy engine he had made for me. When they were published he knew he wanted authenticity and needed a genuine prototype for the illustrator to base his drawing on. He chose the London Brighton & South Coast Railway's E2 tank engine (see *Locomotives*), perhaps simply because he had a convenient photograph to hand.

**Q** Why is Thomas blue?

**A** That is the colour which he painted my original toy engine - stories about that could only have involved a blue engine.

**Q** Why is Thomas a 'Tank' Engine?

**A** The oblong shapes which run along his boiler on either side are tanks in which he stores his water. Perhaps it is worth emphasising the point that Thomas is a tank **engine**, not Thomas the Tank. Thomas the Tank would be a very different sort of machine.

**Q** What does SCC stand for on Bill and Ben?

**A** Sodor China Clay - see *Locomotives*.





**Q** What does NW on the brake van stand for?

**A** North Western - see Chapter 2

**Q** Why are the faces on the back of the Mountain Engines?

**A** The Mountain Engines always push their carriages uphill and support them on the way down - this is the only way, then, that they can actually see where they are going. The carriages keep a look out on the way up the mountain.

### **ISLAND OF SODOR**

**Q** How/when was the Island of Sodor invented?

**A** During a visit to the Isle of Man in 1953 - see Chapter 2

**Q** Is the Island of Sodor based on the Isle of Man?

**A** No, but it lies between Man and the mainland at Barrow-in-Furness, and many place names on the Island are rooted in the Manx language. The fact that the feature film *Thomas and the Magic Railroad*, used the Isle of Man for locations was based, I suspect, more on tax breaks than because of any historical significance, though it was, of course, this latter feature that was pushed in the publicity

**Q** Are the railways on the Island based on those on the Isle of Man?

No, emphatically not. The first involvement my father had with the railways on Man was when we spent a family holiday there in August 1958, well after the Sodor railways were created. Father may very well have done some research at that time into the matter of place-names and Manx history to add flesh to his history of Sodor, but the railways themselves were not involved. So far as I know there is not even a railway incident from the Isle of Man on which he based a story.

**Q** Where does the name Sodor come from?

**A** Please note, incidentally, that this should be pronounced 'Soedor', with a long 'o'. If Father had not known already (though I suspect he did), this may well be one of the things he investigated during our holiday in 1958. The name is a corruption of the Suddries or South Hebrides, and since this area, with the Isle of Man and part of Northern Ireland, came at the time under the jurisdiction of a single Bishop his title became the Bishop of Sodor and Man. The South Hebrides are now part of the See of Argyll, but the Bishop of Sodor and Man retains his ancient honorific.

### **TV/VIDEO**

**Q** What did your father think of the videos?

**A** The first two stuck close to the original stories and their authenticity and he enjoyed them. After Series 3 the TV people decided that they could create 'better' material for themselves and we both became disillusioned with the crass non-authenticity of some of the storylines.

**Q** Did you or your father meet Ringo Starr?

**A** We both did. I met him only once, at the launch of the first TV Series, but he visited my father at his home in Stroud once or twice afterwards. They got on very well

**Q** How did he meet up with Britt Allcroft?

**A** One very wet day in 1979 at Sheffield Park on the Bluebell Railway, in the restaurant there, when she and he were working on a filming project. The lady told him she thought the stories were 'made to be brought to life', and with extreme reservations as to whether it could be done, he said he was willing to allow her to try.

**Q** Why is the Fat Controller always Sir Topham Hatt on TV and at 'Thomas' events?

**A** Purely for 'politically correct' reasons. In my view it is a great pity that Britt Allcroft was co-erced by the Americans into using the character's proper name in order to sell her TV product over there. While understanding the reasons why she capitulated, it has meant that the charm of the character is totally lost. To children a name is a name. Everybody has one, and the joke in the name probably goes way over the heads of most - which makes it pretty pointless. But the words 'The Fat Controller', as it must have done to my young mind, summon up an image to a child and one that he/she can relate to and that imagination can play with. If you doubt me, ask your child to describe the next stout person you see going past your house. Much more interesting. And talking of interest, in my five (so far) visits to the USA and Canada I have been asked about the reasons for the change only three times. I gave the above explanation on each occasion; just one of my questioners disagreed with my view, so I cannot feel that down at grass roots the PC movement on this point, even over there, is really as strong as it must have been made out to be.

**Q** To what extent do you have any say in what happens to the characters?

**A** None whatever, and though when HIT Entertainment took over the Rights in 2002 it was suggested that a return to original authorship was their policy nothing has so far (as at February 2005) happened.

**Q Who benefits from all the spin-offs?**

**A** I have no doubt that, quite rightly, the various manufacturers get their cut, and a percentage also comes to the family and is distributed under the terms of a Trust set up by my father. No doubt the bulk of the income goes to the Rights holder.

### GENERAL

**Q Were your holidays always railway-orientated one?**

**A** Not specifically, at least while we children were young, because my father always considered that he had a wife and children to keep happy too!

**Q Which was your father's favourite engine?**

**A** He always claimed he did not have one, on the grounds that he regarded the engines as part of his family and that in a family you do not have favourites.

**Q Who is your favourite engine?**

**A** Toby - an engine like Toby (see Locomotives) was the first engine I ever footplated, at Great Yarmouth on 30th August 1951, and it was that evening when Father decided that a 'tram' engine would feature in the next book. I was in on Toby right from the start, therefore, and am perhaps unique in that my first two footplate experience were both on J70 tram engines: the second was the following Easter when, discovering that the 'trams' were about to be withdrawn, the late 'Teddy' Boston (later to be immortalised as The Fat Clergyman) arranged for Father and me to spend a day with them on the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway.

**Q Why has Thomas become the most popular character?**

**A** Eight of the first sixteen stories were about Thomas, and this seems to have established a 'Thomas books' trend for the Series during the 1950s and thereafter, though they have always been officially known as the Railway Series. In fact, since 1949 only 21 original Awdry-generated stories have been written specifically about Thomas. In 1984 Britt Allcroft's first TV Series used Thomas as its masthead, and the publishers have since cashed in happily on it: two later titles *Thomas Comes Home* (in which Thomas plays no part except on the final page) and *Thomas and the Fat Controller's Engines* - originally entitled, quite happily right up to the last moment, *The Fat Controller's Engines* - could quite easily have survived without the apparently obligatory 'Thomas'.

**Q Is there anyone who could take over your role in due course?**

**A** My son Richard, as was I at his age, is far too busy with his own interests to be concerned with Thomas and everything which

surrounds him at present. If he should decide later that it is what he wants to do, then I shall wish him well, assuming I am still around to do so, but I do not propose to hang a millstone that he may not want around his neck, and I certainly don't take it for granted that he will carry on.

**Q How old was your father when he stopped writing?**

**A** When asked this question in school I generally have to ask whether the questioner means 'writing the engine stories' (as he/she usually does) or if it is an 'altogether' query. He published his last Railway Series book in 1972 and wrote a further single story (*Thomas's Christmas Party*) for Britt Allcroft's first TV Series - this was published in 1984. There were also two adaptations of earlier stories as picture books. After his 'retirement' from the Railway stories he wrote a variety of things, from railway history to industrial archeological items - the volume already mentioned, *The Island of Sodor, its People, History and Railways* was a notable one - and he wrote the Foreword of a book of mine published in 1990.

**Q Was it ever his aim to write about engines from all parts of the country?**

**A** I don't think it even entered his head; he was much too practical. To do that he would have needed to be still working well beyond 2010 at the rate of more than a book a year!

**Q Did he read the stories to you?**

**A** Always. As entertainment when we were children and later as 'guinea-pigs' when he tried them out on us to see if our reactions were what he wanted them to be. He also knew that the stories were, more often than not, read aloud; he knew also that the best way to find out if a story reads well aloud is to do it - so he did it to us and made his own judgements.

**Q Did your father realise what it was he was starting?**

**A** Certainly not at the time he started it - all he was doing then was trying to amuse a sick child. No doubt thousands of other parents have done the same without the same results. As time went on though he certainly realised it, and he had also discovered some of the consequences by the time he died.

**Q What were your feelings about having such a famous father?**

**A** I don't think 'famous' is exactly the word he would have used. In fact he sometimes, in deprecatory jest, passed it off as 'notoriety', but in any case, for us, as a priest he was always in the spotlight to a certain extent. One more angle on this did not, to us, seem to make a whole lot of difference. In short, any 'fame' he may have had went way over our heads - he was simply our father.



## The Stories, their Origin and Location

### **THE THREE RAILWAY ENGINES, (1945)**

#### **Edward's Day Out**

A simple story based on the rhyme quoted in the Introduction to this volume. Edward seems to have been based in the big shed at Tidmouth "...with five other engines", and it is safe to assume that his journey, probably a local train as far as Wellsworth for no mention is made of his climbing Gordon's Hill, begins from there. We must remember, however, that at this point there was no Island of Sodor and none of the geography that has appeared since.

#### **Edward and Gordon**

Gordon stalls with his goods train on what later became known as Gordon's Hill, which lies between Wellsworth and Cronk - but if Edward lives at and works Tidmouth how come he is available shunting at Wellsworth to be able to supply banking assistance...? There is no implication in the story that he has had to travel anywhere to find his trucks - but see the comment above about the lack of geography at this stage. The story itself is based on a tale Father no doubt heard from railwaymen at our local station at the time, King's Norton, of similar difficulties experienced by trains on the nearby Lickey Incline.

#### **The Sad Story of Henry**

Chapter and verse are not available to me for the origin of this one, though I remember hearing Father tell how an engine, during the pioneering days in America, broke down in a tunnel and was simply abandoned. The rhyme that opens the story my father recalled from his childhood - a version of it was published in a children's book of verses in 1902, along with an illustration which gave the engine concerned rudimentary human features. Henry's Tunnel lies between Vicarstown and Crovan's Gate.

#### **Edward, Gordon and Henry**

Edmund Ward, who published this book in May 1945, requested, on seeing the first three stories, a fourth which "...brings Henry out of his tunnel and gives us a happy ending." This is the story which Father devised for him - Gordon, pulling the Express, breaks down outside the tunnel, and Henry and Edward together save the day.

### **THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE, (1946)**

#### **Thomas and Gordon**

Thomas, as station pilot at Vicarstown, cheeks Gordon but accidentally gets his come-uppance when, having taken the coaches of the Express to the platform, the station staff forget to uncouple him and he gets pulled

along with the train. I understand that the basis of this idea was an incident which took place at Liverpool Street, London, and the train in question was one of the Great Eastern Railway's 'Jazz' commuter trains.

#### **Thomas's Train**

Thomas, agitating to pull a train of his own, gets the chance when Henry is ill but sets off by himself when, in a reversal of the previous story, the station staff forget to couple him to it. Something like this, I believe, also happened on the 'Jazz' service, but has probably occurred elsewhere on other occasions too.

#### **Thomas and the Trucks**

Edward visits Vicarstown with a goods train and offers to do Thomas's work while he (Thomas) takes Edward's trucks home. There is another inconsistency here, because 'home' in this case seems to be Wellsworth at the foot of Gordon's Hill, though it would fit with Edward, in Edward and Gordon - see above - shunting at Wellsworth. Anyhow, Thomas here is pushed down the hill by the trucks and is greeted by The Fat Director, who is stern at first, but mellows later. This story brings out some of the dangers involved in working unbraked goods wagons down hills, an unavoidable part of any goods crew's life. It is also, incidentally, notable for the first use in the Series of the catchphrase 'Really Useful Engine'.

#### **Thomas and the Breakdown Train**

James, too, is pushed down Gordon's Hill by trucks, and is derailed near Crosby. Thomas is pressed into service to take the breakdown train to the rescue: as a reward for his day's work he is proclaimed a Really Useful Engine and given a branch line of his own along with two coaches. There is no particular incident as a basis for this story, but it does work into the narrative the facts that locomotives once had wooden brakeblocks and that these could be unreliable.

### **JAMES THE RED ENGINE, (1948)**

After a break in writing during 1946/7 while Father was extra-busy sorting out the wartime problems of a new parish, Edmund Ward asked for new stories at about Easter 1948. James was written quickly and, because of this, was always Father's least favourite book, the one that every author will recognise as "...the one he'd like to do again."

#### **James and the Top-Hat**

James, a new engine introduced in the previous story, has an outing with Edward on a local stopping train. While standing at Cronk, James, in his enthusiasm, lets off steam and sprays water over The Fat Controller's (ex-Fat Director - see People, Sir Topham Hatt 1) top-hat. That gentleman is cross, and threatens to take away James's smart red coat. Many people standing on a platform near a steam engine must have had a similar experience though, perhaps fortunately, we do not all wear top-hats.



### *James and the Boot-lace*

James, bumping his coaches crossly, causes a hole to develop in the vacuum brake pipe, which brings his train to an un-scheduled stop near Kellsthorpe Road. The leak is stopped with newspapers and a leather boot-lace in an echo of a snippet which my father no doubt read in the pages of *The Railway Magazine* or *The Railway Gazette*.

### *Troublesome Trucks*

There have been many recorded instances of goods trains' couplings parting on hills, and James is only one of a long line of engines to whom it has happened. It happens, inevitably, on Gordon's Hill, but James' eventual success in bringing his complete train home (again to Wellsworth judging by the illustration) also brings a rapprochement with the Fat Controller, who tells him "...now you deserve to keep your red coat."

### *James and the Express*

Gordon, full of his own importance, sets out from Tidmouth with the Express, but a signalman's error sends him round the loop and back to Tidmouth; there is, in fact, no such loop shown on the map, but the story is pre-geography (see above). There have been misdirected trains since railways began, and no doubt Father used this idea as a basis for his story. James, the only engine available, pulls the Express instead and has another success.

## **TANK ENGINE THOMAS AGAIN, (1949)**

### *Thomas and the Guard*

Thomas has his branch line (see Thomas and the Breakdown Train, above), which runs from Knapford Junction to Ffarquhar, and two coaches, whom he has called Annie and Clarabel. This is a simple story of a Guard who gets left behind at Knapford Junction after falling over parcels and being too late to get into his van. More than one Guard has been left standing on the platform, but the particular incident on which Father drew took place at Eastbourne - the Guard involved at that time solved his dilemma by taking a taxi to Polegate, where his train had been held for him.

### *Thomas Goes Fishing*

This was a favourite story of my father's (and mine too, for that matter). The water standpipe at Elsbridge is faulty, so Thomas gets water from the river Els, but fish are included in the delivery and block the inlet pipe to his boiler. The story is based on an anecdote related in one of David L Smith's books about the Glasgow & South Western Railway, concerning a driver who kept fish in his engine's watertank in order, he claimed, to keep the water clean. Incidentally, the bridge depicted in the picture on p19 is based on Brunel's flattened-arch masterpiece across the Thames at Maidenhead.

### *Thomas, Terence and the Snow*

Tales of engines being snowed in are legion, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a tractor has come to the rescue on more than one occasion, though it may be that Father read of a specific incident to inspire the story. The tunnel depicted is towards the northern end of Thomas's branch line and the story marks the introduction to the saga of both Terence and a (then) un-named bus, of whom we hear more in the next story...

### *Thomas and Bertie*

...which grew from a board game which my father devised to amuse his three children during a wet holiday in Wales. The game featured an un-named bus and an un-named engine, but these became Bertie and Thomas respectively when Father recognised the race's story potential. The 'top station' referred to is Ffarquhar. There have now been several 'race' stories in the saga, and this is the first of them: I find it a particularly effective story to read aloud, though this comment could be made of all four tales in this book.

## **TROUBLESOME ENGINES, (1950)**

Staff unrest on British Railways was rife when his book was published (1950) and this is reflected in the stories.

### *Henry and the Elephant*

Father ventured overseas for the second time for the basis of this story, adapting in incident which occurred in India. Of course, substantial adaptation - the elephant becomes a circus animal rather than a wild one, for instance - was necessary, but the fact that the animal was found to be blocking a tunnel, and moved only when prompted by a train is authentic. More importantly for the tone of the book, it gives Henry a grievance, as does...

### *Tenders and Turntables*

...with regard to Gordon and James respectively. Gordon jams the turntable at Tidmouth and cannot be turned (an everyday railway occurrence), and so has to pull his next train backwards. When it is James's turn he is blown round like a roundabout, as was a locomotive in a famous incident at Hawes Junction, and the three engines decide to go on strike in protest. That turntable from Hawes Junction, incidentally, is now at Keighley, Yorkshire, and is used to turn the locomotives of the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway.

### *Trouble in the Shed*

The shed in the title is at Tidmouth and the Fat Controller is not amused. He tells Edward to shunt for the big engines for the time being, but then buys Percy to do this work while Thomas and Edward run the trains - the

strikers are the subject of a 'lock-in'. Percy proves great success, and has become one of the more popular engines with children. Though I haven't counted there must be almost as many stories in the saga about him as there are about Thomas!

### *Percy Runs Away*

And this is another of them. Percy, while shunting, finds himself stranded on the main line in front of Gordon, approaching at speed with the Express, a story which I know to be based on fact, though my father's record of the incident and original location has disappeared. The story's location on the Island is at Knapford Junction, and Percy reaches Wellsworth before he is finally turned off the main line. In the omission by the engine-crew to carry out Rule 55 at Knapford Junction this incident too reflects a real one at Hawes Junction in 1910 though, thankfully, with less tragic results.

## **HENRY THE GREEN ENGINE, (1951)**

### *Coal*

Henry is in a bad way. As explained above (see Locomotives), he is not the engine the Fat Controller had wanted and his firebox is too small for the work he is required to do. My father was minded to write him out of the Series altogether, but realised what an uproar that would cause from the Henry fans, and this book represents a rethink, creating causality for the Fat Controller to keep him. In this story special Welsh coal is bought for Henry as an experiment, and proves that Henry can make the steam he needs, given the proper conditions.

### *The Flying Kipper*

Father's solution to Henry's problem was an accident, which takes place at Killdane, beyond the top of Gordon's Hill, while Henry is hauling the nightly fish train, 'The Flying Kipper', to the mainland. The situation is reminiscent, though not exactly described, of the accident at Abbot's Ripton in 1876, when ice and snow caused a signal failure and collision. Henry is sent away to Crewe for a rebuild and, because William Stanier, now in charge at Crewe, owes Sir Topham a favour, Henry comes back looking not unlike one of Stanier Class 5MT locomotives. Bad steaming has never caused trouble since.

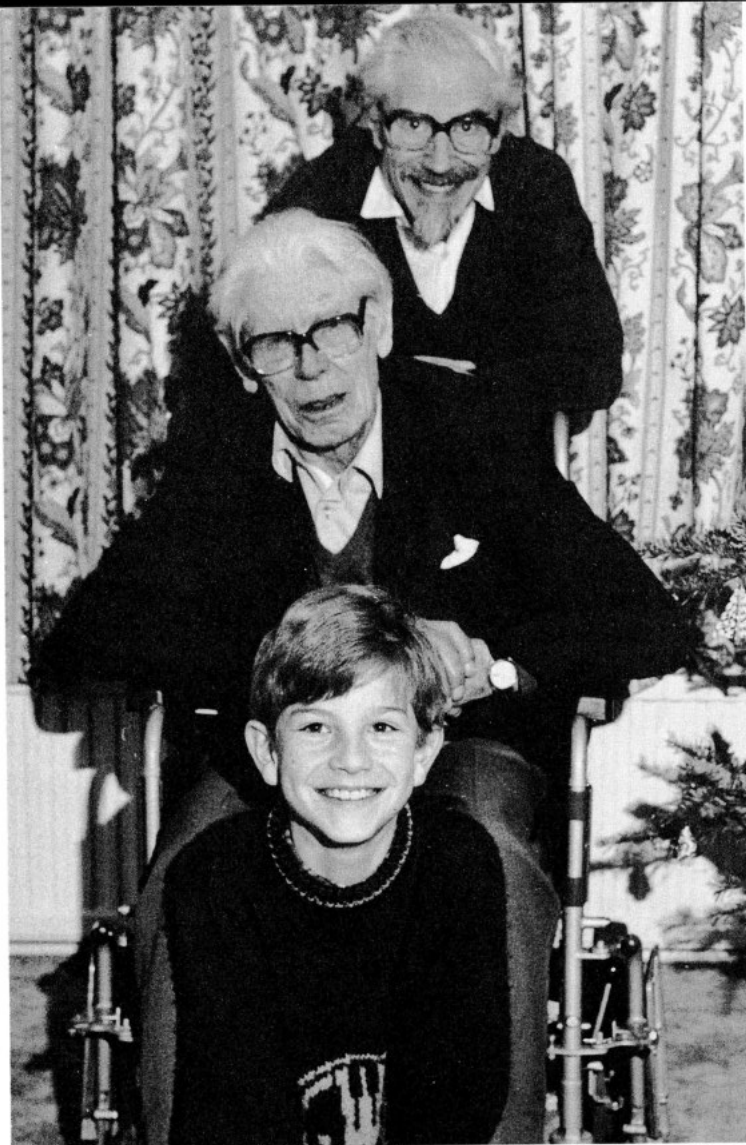
### *Gordon's Whistle*

Gordon is upset by Henry's cheerful whistling, and makes reproving remarks about it. But the other engines have the last laugh when Gordon's whistle jams open and has to be righted with hammers. This sort of mishap was fairly frequent on the real railway, and I witnessed something similar myself on the preserved Tallylyn Railway during the summer of 2004.



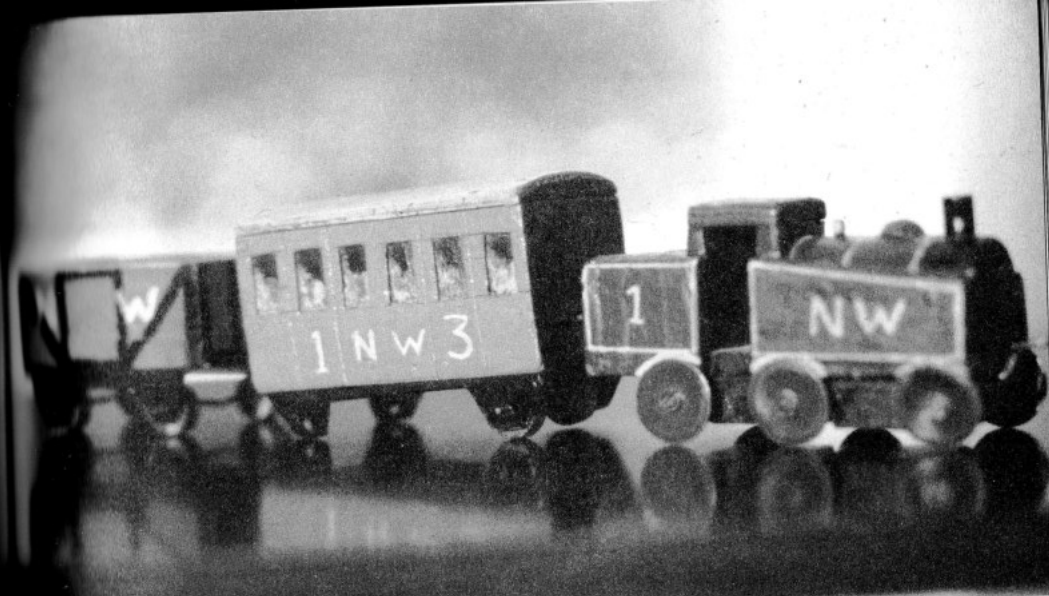
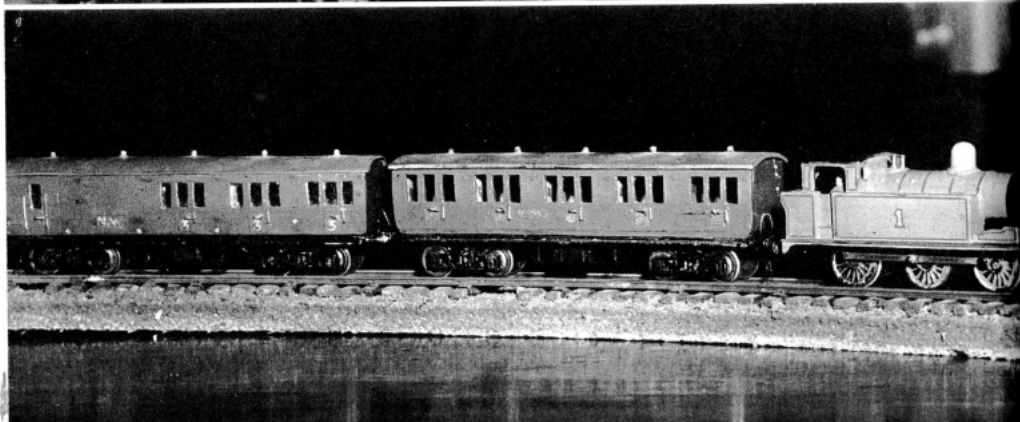
The Rev W Awdry in his study at Emneth, 1955, with the relief map of the Island of Sodor which hung on his wall. He is indicating the course of the Skarloey Railway. (Wisbech Advertiser)





Left: three generations of Awdrys at Christmas 1991 - Christopher (top), WVA (centre) and Richard, then aged 11 (Allan Mott)

Below: early models built by WVA and photographed in 1953 - from right, Thomas (1948), Annie (1926/7) and Clarabel (1948). These models ran on several version of the 'Ffarquhar Branch'. (Wisbech Advertiser)

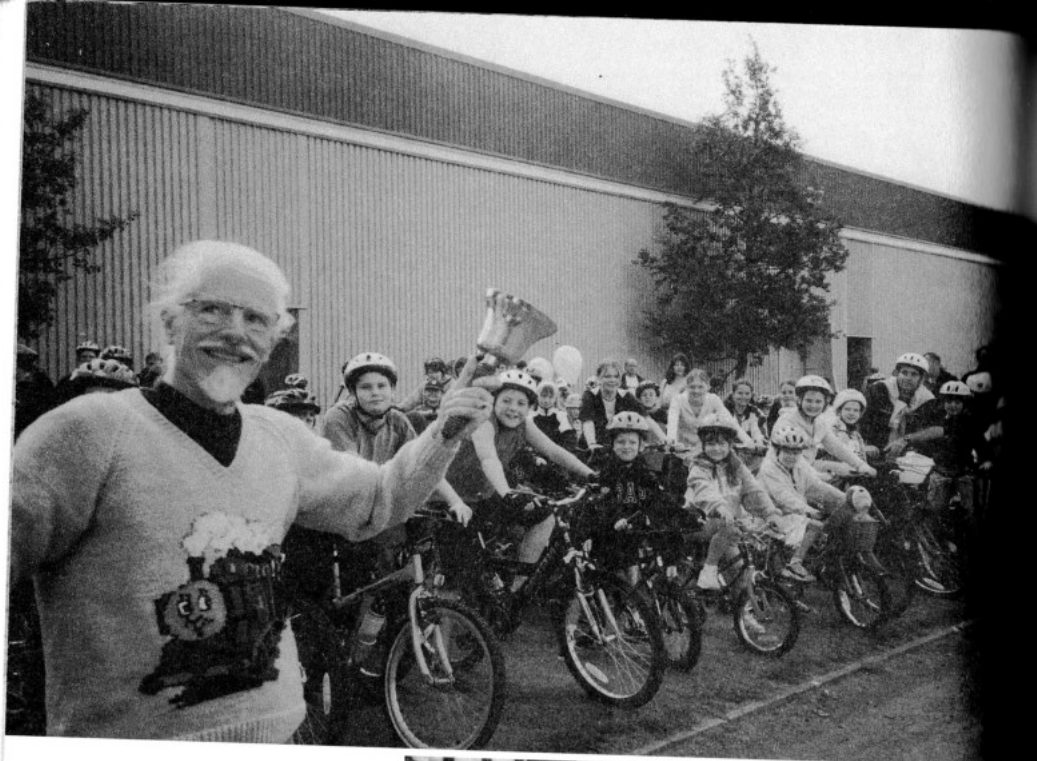


Above: the original 'Thomas', with such rolling stock as survived in 1990. The engine was made for the author late in 1942 and the rolling stock during the two or three years following. (Allan Mott).

Below: the author with a group of youngsters during a Literacy class, part of a 'Learning with Thomas' fortnight at the Kent & East Sussex Railway in June 2002. (Helen Bedford)







Above: the author ringing the Sleaford Town Crier's bell to start a Blue Peter Bikeathon for Leukaemia Research at Spalding on 11th May 2003. (Andy Fuller).

Right: Jasper, Alberta, Canada, 15th May 2004. From the left Ray Smalley (Thomas merchandising agent), Ross Pugh (Jasper Camera & Gift), Thomas and the author relax for a moment during an event at Ross Pugh's store. (Helen Bedford)



### ***Percy and the Trousers***

This story, as Father acknowledges in print, is based on one told by his friend C Hamilton Ellis in *The Trains We Loved*. Percy wants a scarf, but acquires one he would rather not have had when, coming quietly into Tidmouth station, he hits a luggage trolley and gets The Fat Controller's trousers wound round his funnel. This is the shortest story in the Series (only 4 pages) and Father consequently managed to squeeze five stories into this book, making it unique in that respect.

### ***Henry's Sneeze***

Vandals who drop things on engines were, alas, just as rife in 1951 as in the present day. From a bridge near Crosby boys drop stones on Henry and his driver decides to use a steam engine's ability to emit soot and ash from its funnel on demand to punish them - the process, possible with an engine fitted with an ash ejector, was described in *The Railway Gazette* c1960. The originally published text of the story referred to the boys running away "...as black as niggers...", but the book had been in print for some years before anyone realised that the phrase might cause offence. As a result the passage now refers to 'soot' instead.

### ***TOBY THE TRAM ENGINE, (1952)***

My father, accompanied by myself, saw his first 'tram' engine on 30th August 1951, on the fishquay at Great Yarmouth, and it was there that the idea for this book germinated.

### ***Toby and the Stout Gentleman***

While much Toby material was subsequently gleaned from the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway, this is perhaps the place to try to scotch the myth, current in those parts, that their Tramway inspired the book: it was as described above. We did not visit the Tramway at Wisbech until Easter 1952, and by that time all the first Toby stories were done and dusted for publication that autumn. The first story sets the scene, and Toby's line, depicted in a setting quite unlike the Fens, is visited by a Stout Gentleman and his family while on holiday. The line closes but we have a cliffhanger which leads into...

### ***Thomas in Trouble***

...when Thomas, running the roadside tramway to the quarry at Ffarquhar, is told by a policeman that he is in breach of the law in the matter of cowcatchers and sideplates. The Fat Controller - who turns out to have been the Stout Gentleman in the previous story - remembers Toby and brings him and his faithful coach Henrietta to the Island of Sodor to run the tramway instead of Thomas.

### ***Dirty Objects***

One of my favourite stories, this. James is boasting how wonderful his paintwork is and how he is never dirty, but as in all these tales, pride comes before a fall - pushed down Gordon's Hill by his trucks, he collides with two tar wagons, becoming "...black from smokebox to cab." Though the location is not specified, this must, since it lies at the foot of Gordon's Hill, take place in the goods yard at Wellsworth, though it is not made clear why Toby, a long way from his roadside tramway, should be there and available to help sort out the mess. The most likely explanation is that he is on the way to Crovan's Gate for an overhaul and happens to be handy at the time.

### ***Mrs Kyndley's Christmas***

This story sees Mrs Kyndley's debut in the Series. Ill in bed, she spots a landslide in the cutting just below the tunnel on Thomas's branch line and hangs her red dressing-gown (shades of *The Railway Children*) from the window as a warning for the train to stop. It does, and as a 'thankyou' for her services The Fat Controller and the passengers give her a trip to Bournemouth (p62) to recuperate from her illness.

### ***GORDON THE BIG ENGINE, (1953)***

#### ***Off the Rails***

Gordon, whose fire has been sluggish, begins to make steam while he is on the Vicarstown turntable and he runs forward off it to end up in a ditch - this actually happened at South Lynn, Norfolk, when an engine, 4MT 2-6-0 No 43142 was being turned to take a train back to Peterborough. The newspaper cutting from which my father took the idea is undated, but my guess would be that the incident occurred around 1950. Even the method adopted to rescue the locomotive is used in the story exactly as it is described in the paper.

#### ***Leaves***

This episode takes place on Gordon's Hill and is based on an incident which actually took place in Bincombe tunnel, Sussex - in slippery conditions a locomotive was dragged back by the coaches it was supposedly pulling. Gordon's input to the story of James' predicament is all part of the rehabilitation process following Gordon's disgrace in the first story.

#### ***Down the Mine***

Thomas, after cheeking Gordon about his adventure in the ditch, gets his own come-uppance when he falls through the roof of a lead mine. This story is based on the incident of 1892, when a Furness Railway engine, at Lindal-in-Furness, was engulfed in a collapsing mineshaft and sank out of sight - it is now reckoned to be around 200 feet underground. I use this story in schools to explain to children how an author adapts ideas -

obviously if Thomas had gone down the full distance there would have been no more stories about him, so my father instead deliberately arranged a situation in which Thomas went so far and no further. Gordon continues his rehabilitation by hauling Thomas back to firm ground.

### ***Paintpots and Queens***

The Island of Sodor has a Royal Visit, but who will pull the Royal Train? Henry, in line for the job, unsights a painter at Tidmouth, who falls and drops his paint - this did happen, I believe at Preston - and Gordon gets his reward. I have always thought this story a small masterpiece: one very tiny authentic incident around which is woven an interplay that never loses its drive and interest.

### ***EDWARD THE BLUE ENGINE, (1954)***

#### ***Cows***

There was an occasion in South Africa when a herd of elephants charged a train and did some damage to it. We don't have elephants on the Island of Sodor - except when the circus comes - but my father coupled this idea with a perennial problem here, that of livestock straying on to the line. After teasing Edward about his train, charged by cattle on the main line between Knapford and Crosby, it is Gordon himself who is embarrassed when he encounters a wandering cow and her calf on a bridge near Balladrine.

#### ***Bertie's Chase***

Something like this happened, I think in Ireland - a bus, running late, tried by stages to catch up with a train, and, as Bertie does, eventually succeeded. Bertie starts his chase of Edward's train with Thomas' late-arriving passengers from Knapford Junction and, after another abortive effort at Wellsworth, finally catches Edward at Maron, the station near the summit of Gordon's Hill.

#### ***Saved From Scrap***

This is the story which introduces one of the Series' best-loved characters - Trevor the Traction Engine. Trevor is for sale in a scrapyards at Wellsworth, and Edward persuades the Vicar of Wellsworth (see People) to buy him. The tale was inspired by a clergyman neighbour of Father's, who did precisely what the Vicar in this story does with Trevor.

#### ***Old Iron***

This story is based on an incident noted in the *Daily Express* and reprinted in *The Railway Gazette* around 1954, when the rescue of a runaway engine was achieved, near Alton, Illinois, in the manner described - though I'm not sure that today's Health and Safety Inspectors would approve! James runs away from Maron and is recovered roughly midway between Killdane and Kellsthorpe: it is Edward, of course, who comes to James's rescue, thus earning himself an overhaul.

### **FOUR LITTLE ENGINES, (1955)**

This book was suggested to my father by the then General Manager of the Talyllyn Railway, Tom Rolt, when Father was doing a stint as a volunteer in 1952, as an idea for publicity for the Railway. Subjects for the stories suggested themselves quite quickly and the Skarloey Railway was thus created, though the book itself had to wait until 1955 for publication - see below.

#### ***Skarloey Remembers***

The publishers gave some resistance to a book about 'new' engines at first, but a compromise that they should be introduced by a well-known engine gives Edward the role of 'listener' in this introductory tale. Parallels to the Talyllyn are very close - for details of the relationships between the Skarloey engines and the real thing, see Locomotives.

#### ***Sir Handel***

In his previous life, on the Mid Sodor Railway, Sir Handel was a passenger engine. He objects strongly (and rudely) to four-wheeled coaches and when told to pull trucks settles himself between the rails in pique. Very authentic - when No.3 came from the Corris Railway to the Talyllyn in the early 1950s his wheeltracks were too narrow for the Talyllyn's sometimes rather liberal gauge and he spent some time between the rails!

#### ***Peter Sam and the Refreshment Lady***

Father loved a story against himself, and I myself can vouch for the authenticity of this one, since I witnessed it from the Guard's Van. Father indeed it was, as Guard, who left the Refreshment Lady behind - a piquant footnote is that the lady's son-in-law was the driver of the train! If pressed to name my favourite story this one comes very near the top of the list.

#### ***Old Faithful***

There were a number of occasions on which the old Talyllyn engines struggled on in the face of dire adversity in order to keep the trains running, and this story is based on one of them. In 1952 we none of us, I think, expected ever to see the old TR No.1 *Talyllyn* running again, but by 1958 she was, and perhaps, in some small way, this book helped it to happen.

Father was proud of that.

### **PERCY THE SMALL ENGINE, (1956)**

#### ***Percy and the Signal***

'Backing signals', though they might seem not only illogical but also dangerous, were indeed a part of railway life, and my father makes use of the idea here to land Percy in just the sort of scrape a naive child might get himself into. The signal at which the story takes place is at Knapford.

#### ***Duck Takes Charge***

One Christmas my father, perhaps tiring of my repeated knocking on his study door to 'borrow an engine, please,' to use on his model railway, bought me one of my own, a second-hand Great Western pannier tank engine. When we tested it we found that one of the wheels was not quite true on its axle so that the engine 'waddled' slightly as it ran - and the nickname Duck was born. Well, he just had to get into a book, didn't he... This story is an imaginary, though, given that the engines are 'human', not impossible one which provides causality for Duck's introduction to the railway.

#### ***Percy and Harold***

My father found somewhere a note of a 'race' between a helicopter and a train, and created Harold merely as an incidental character for the story's sake. But, as Father later said, like Topsy, Harold just grew... The new harbour works mentioned in the story are at Knapford.

#### ***Percy's Promise***

A train was stranded in five feet of water near Hunstanton, Norfolk, after a tidal wave. The crew managed to get the train back to Hunstanton by using the floorboards of the Guard's Van, but there was no helicopter involvement. This was simply the story-teller's evidence of another use for Harold. Harold lives at Toryreck Airfield, beside Thomas's branch line, and the flood was nearby, where the railway runs close to the river Els.

### **THE EIGHT FAMOUS ENGINES, (1957)**

I think my father had half-hoped that, having done a round dozen of books, he could call time on them, so he wrote a set of stories which he considered might round things off. Publishers are generally aware of when they are on to a good thing, however, and an end to the series was certainly not on their agenda.

#### ***Percy Takes the Plunge***

I have sometimes wondered whether this story was not originally intended for the previous book. I can find in Father's scrapbook no mention of an incident which may have sparked off this story but I have no shadow of doubt something like it happened - it sounds, if you understand me, too good to be untrue! He may have read or heard the tale of the contractor's locomotive which ran off the end of, I think, the jetty at Burnham-on-Sea, which I came across only very recently. The harbour in question here is at Knapford.

#### ***Gordon Goes Foreign***

I suspect an anecdote father was told of confusion between two LMS stations, Euston and St.Pancras (Broad Street was a third) in London may have been the inspiration for this one. Gordon, as an ex-LNER engine,



would have expected neither, but ends up, to his disgust, at St.Pancras instead of King's Cross.

### **Double Header**

By 1957 we were living near Wisbech and the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway which had used the ex-Great Eastern Railway 'tram' engines. Now and then the 'trams' had had to travel to Stratford (London) for repair or overhaul - they had small water-tanks containing only 600 or so gallons of water, and, like Toby, one once found itself stranded and had to be 'helped' by the following train. Toby is heading for the Works at Crovan's Gate, and gets just beyond Kildane when his water gives out and he has to be pushed home by James.

### **The Fat Controller's Engines**

This was to be the final story - maybe. Cavalcades of engines have happened, and something like Thomas's accident certainly did too. I think that the engines' reaction to their adventures is probably exactly right.

## **DUCK AND THE DIESEL ENGINE, (1958)**

### **Domeless Engines**

The Railway has a visit from *City of Truro*, but Gordon takes exception to the fact that he has no dome. The brakeshoe is on the other wheel, however, when, true to a real-life incident, he loses his domecover as its fastenings work loose and wind gets underneath it. This unfortunate (for Gordon) event happens on the viaduct, which crosses the river valley just to the west of Cronk.

### **Pop Goes the Diesel**

I am not sure what it was that encouraged Father to introduce Diesel. They were just beginning to make an appearance on British Railways, and perhaps he felt that altogether too much was being made of them so that they needed to be taken down a peg or two. Diesel, certainly, is too cocksure by half, but he can't take teasing...

### **Dirty Work**

Diesel decides to try and get his own back on Duck, who has annoyed him, by telling untrue stories about Gordon, Henry and James and pretending that Duck is responsible. The Fat Controller, aware of this, though the reader is not, sends Duck away so that Diesel can have enough cable with which to throttle himself.

### **A Close Shave**

Something like this story happened on the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway c1960, though on this occasion skilful judgment by the driver enabled the two halves of the train to come back together with "...only a

slight jolt," according to the newspaper cutting I have. I suspect this idea was combined with a railway-yard collision with a coal-merchant's hut or something similar. Whatever, Duck redeems himself, the Fat Controller reveals all, and Diesel is sent away in disgrace. As to location, the trucks break away at Maron and the barber's shop into which Duck intrudes is at Crosby.

## **THE LITTLE OLD ENGINE, (1959)**

### **Trucks!**

My father took the chance to visit the Skarloey Railway a second time, and used the not infrequent incident of a runaway down a quarry incline to put Peter Sam on the receiving end of a nasty bump and a cold bath. There was a watering point a short distance below the bottom incline on the Talylllyn Railway, which Father used to add verisimilitude to his story.

### **Home at Last**

Skarloey comes home, a story no doubt prompted by the return to the Talylllyn, after overhaul, of Skarloey's twin, Talylllyn. In 1958 a 'new' engine had arrived on the Talylllyn, named *Douglas*. He becomes Duncan for the Series, and with his short wheelbase and small wheels was very apt to do Rock n'Roll - this story and the next...

### **Rock n'Roll**

...draw on this propensity, which in this particular story is unfortunately only too true to life. As Rusty suggests, however, gradual refurbishment of the track has made this less of a problem.

### **Little Old Twins**

A story which was clearly inspired by a visit to the Talylllyn of a television crew for a programme in which Father took part. The details and the arrangements of the day he witnessed at first hand, and faithfully describes. The story ends with a reference to the Talylllyn and to the fact that 'twin' engines to the Skarloey Railway ones exist there.

## **BRANCH LINE ENGINES, (1960)**

### **Thomas Comes to Breakfast**

One of my father's favourite stories and one of mine too, for that matter. The location is Ffarquhar but whether the runaway on which my father based the story actually collided with a stationmaster's house or some other dwelling I am unsure. I suspect the latter, but the former makes a better story. In fact there was also an ulterior motive behind this tale: the original artist had drawn Thomas with a drop-front to his frame but had omitted to put one at the back - obviously impossible, since this would leave Thomas's buffers at a different height. Father saw his opportunity to damage Thomas's front and bring him back, after repair, with a straight

frame - see the illustration on p57 - to correct the buffer levels. The TV image unfortunately perpetuates the incorrect form!

### **Daisy**

Diesel railcars were making incursions on branch lines by 1961, and the Ffarquhar branch is no exception. This is Daisy's introduction and points up some of the problems that there were (and are) with diesel engines in relation to terminal illness at the overload of a fuse or the drop of a trip-switch.

### **Bulls-eyes**

Another idea that has probably happened more than once, though there is a note in Father's scrapbook only of a bull that was chased off the line by a farmer and a policeman. Father's solution, I feel, is much more entertaining, though bullseyes as we knew them in my childhood are a thing of the past so perhaps the story is not, perhaps, quite so comprehensible to children (some of the parents, even) of today.

### **Percy's Predicament**

Percy, pushed down the quarry line by trucks, collides with loaded stone trucks in the Ffarquhar yard and ends up perched on one of them. When this story was published Father had an indignant letter from an ex-railwayman claiming that such a situation was not possible. My father had great delight in sending the gentleman a copy of the picture (published in *Model Railway News* in 1958) from which the illustration on p53 was made. For the record, the incident happened at Swanley Junction on 13th April 1876, to London, Chatham & Dover Railway No.123, *Phyllis*.

## **GALLANT OLD ENGINE, (1961)**

### **Special Funnel**

In this first of another set of Skarloey Railway stories, Father combines two ideas: the occasion when No.4 on the Corris Railway collided with a bridge and broke its funnel - the bits, with the collar that held it temporarily together can be seen in the Corris Railway Museum at Corris - and the offer of a Giesl ejector to the Talyllyn Railway, which was fitted to ex-Corris No.4. Icicles in tunnels were not uncommon, either.

### **Steam-roller**

Not much doubt where this idea came from, for it is acknowledged at the foot of the story's first page - an incident in Ireland related in *Narrow Gauge Album* by the late Pat Whitehouse.

### **Passengers and Polish**

Another of my favourite stories - it reads aloud brilliantly and we frequently enjoy it at Talyllyn Railway 'events'. A similar derailment I witnessed and assisted with on the Talyllyn at Dolgoch during the 1950s,

and Duncan's 'strike' is based on an incident when *Douglas* (Talyllyn No.6 and therefore Duncan's alter ego) stalled on Dolgoch Viaduct at a similar sort of period.

### **Gallant Old Engine**

The source of this story is acknowledged too, *Railway Adventure* by Tom Rolt, the gentleman who started Father off on the Skarloey saga. The Talyllyn Railway's No.2, worn out, shouldered most of the traffic in the early days and, like Rheneas, kept on going on. Without her efforts perhaps the Talyllyn's efforts at preservation might have failed.

## **STEPNEY THE BLUEBELL ENGINE, (1963)**

### **Bluebells of England**

Father, I suspect, held a similar soft spot for the Bluebell Railway in Sussex as he did for the Talyllyn, and I believe this book was written at the suggestion of people connected with the Railway. *Stepney* comes to visit Thomas on the Island of Sodor, and the first story is an introductory one which not only sets the scene for the rest of the book, but gives a brief introduction to the Bluebell Railway too. The illustrations indicate that most of this story is based at Knapford Junction.

### **Stepney's Special**

This branch line story is based on an incident related in *The Railway Gazette* in June 1959. One night in 1905 a gentleman missed the midnight train to Aylesbury and ordered a special - the 12 o'clock train was shunted at Chorleywood to let the special pass, and the later-running gentleman actually got home long before everyone else...

### **Train Stops Play**

An incident like this happened at Stroud in May 1960, when a train, halting for a signal on an embankment, was asked to move on because it had stopped behind the bowler's arm. On the Island of Sodor the cricket match is at Elsbridge.

### **Bowled Out**

This too is authenticated from the pages of *The Railway Gazette* in late 1960 or early 1961. A new diesel engine, on trial with BR, had to be towed away by a steam locomotive after an inspector's bowler hat was sucked into the fan duct, thus cutting off the supply of air to the engine. On Sodor the incident takes place in Tidmouth yard.

## **MOUNTAIN ENGINES, (1964)**

This too may have been a 'request' book - it is based on the Snowdon Mountain Railway in North Wales. I have never felt quite at home with this one - it is out with the normal pattern, but one cannot deny that the stories read well. It may be worth making the point that though

'incidents' at Snowdon may perhaps seem over-frequent, one of the reasons why the book has never had a successor is largely because, since the line is unique in Britain, there are in fact very few authentic incidents on which stories can be based!

### **Mountain Engine**

Culdee, one of the mountain engines, on its way back from repair, halts at Crovan's Gate near the Skarloey Railway, and the opportunity is taken to introduce the mountain railway and explain some of its characters and characteristics.

### **Bad Look-out**

A revisiting of the accident on the opening day of the Snowdon Mountain Railway back in 1896, when an engine derails and rolls down the mountain. In father's version the engine concerned has his parts used as spares, and, dumped at the back of the shed, gets smaller and smaller...

### **Danger Points**

Another story based on an actual incident, though rather more recent than 1896. In fact, during the late 1980s and shortly before I was due to visit the library in Llanberis for a session with local children, there was a second similar mishap. As may be imagined it was the talk of the town though the railway itself was being very stiff-lipped about it. In Father's version Lord Harry, too big for his wheels, disgraces himself by becoming derailed on points at the Summit station.

### **Devil's Back**

Devil's Back has definite affinity with the Clogwyn ridge on Snowdon. Contrary to railway ones, climbing accidents, alas, are very frequent on Snowdon, and my father takes the chance to redeem Lord Harry's reputation by having him carry out a brave rescue after one of them. The young man who is rescued requests later that Lord Harry be renamed Patrick after himself.

### **VERY OLD ENGINES, (1965)**

Yet another trip along the Skarloey Railway, but this time we are taken back to the opening of the railway in 1865. This book was to celebrate the Centenary of the Talyllyn in 1965, a fact which provided a very convenient excuse.

### **Crosspatch**

Nancy, a Guard's daughter who appeared in *Passengers and Polish* (see *Gallant Old Engine*, above), makes another appearance as the recipient of Skarloey's reminiscences about the old days, when he and Rheneas were new to the railway. Father does not miss the chance to get in a mention of another engine like Skarloey, being built at the same time for a certain railway in Wales...

### **Bucking Bronco**

When the Talyllyn's No.1 was delivered it had a propensity to sway up and down as it travelled. My father uses this idea, and although *Talyllyn* did not actually rock anyone off the footplate, the means of solving the up and down motion for Skarloey was the same - a pair of trailing wheels.

### **Stick-in-the-Mud**

Skarloey comes back from repair with a cab as well as trailing wheels, another Talyllyn Railway parallel. Rheneas had not got one and this leads to a certain amount of bad feeling.

### **Duck and Dukes**

For the final tale Father returns to the present day, and the celebrations for the Centenary, as a part of which the Duke of Sodor is coming to open the new loop line round the lake. There is a misunderstanding by Peter Sam when Duck, in Great Western mode, refers to 'Dukes' as engines which have been scrapped - though he does not make it clear they are engines rather than people. Peter Sam believes that the Duke who is coming to open the loop line cannot therefore be a real Duke after all, but everyone is mightily relieved when they find that he is! Another reference to the Talyllyn and its own Centenary ends the book.

### **MAIN LINE ENGINES, (1966)**

As Father confesses in his Foreword, Bill and Ben, the China Clay twins, came to play a rather larger role in this book than had been originally intended. *Main Line Engines* was the plan and the title, and indeed, Gordon, James and Edward are all featured, but the Twins keep popping up...

### **The Diseasel**

This story serves to introduce china clay and the twins, Bill and Ben, (for more details see *Locomotives*) with a lot of lighthearted backchat around a health slogan in use at the time "Coughs and Sneezes spread diseases - catch them in your handkerchief". The story also brings in BoCo for the first time, one of the only diesels in the saga who never seems to have upset anybody. The 'china clay harbour' is at Brendam.

### **Buzz Buzz**

A swarm of bees escapes at Tidmouth station and James gets stung on the nose. This is based on an incident at London Bridge - related first in the august pages of *The Times*, no less - when staff, passengers and even a train disappeared as if by magic when just six bees escaped from a damaged hive.

### **Wrong Road**

Over the years a great number of trains have been misdirected for one reason or another - Gordon in *James and the Express* was one - see



*James the Red Engine*, above - and Father no doubt had a hard and fast example for this one. The lady in the green floppy hat which is mistaken for the Guard's green flag is authentic too - at Sittingbourne, in 1911. But the Twins' threat to push Gordon into the sea **must** have been Father's fun - mustn't it?

### ***Edward's Exploit***

Edward's branch line runs from Cronk to Brendam, and it is during a journey along here that one of his left-hand crank-pins shears, the coupling rod then severely damaging his frame. There was a much more serious result when something similar happened to the crosshead assembly of an express near Settle in 1960. Edward limps bravely home as a single-wheeler, as has probably happened more times on the railway than most of us have had hot dinners.

### ***SMALL RAILWAY ENGINES, (1967)***

My father and his great friend the Rev'd 'Teddy' Boston visited the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway in Cumbria a number of times, and these stories are some of the fruits of their trips - both men are depicted in the illustrations, and in the text are described respectively as the Thin and Fat Clergyman.

### ***Ballast***

An introductory story which sets out the causality for the 'new' railway on Sodor, introduces us to the engines Rex, Bert and Mike (for more details see *Locomotives*) and has a very close affinity with past events on the Ravenglass line.

### ***Tit for Tat***

Another example of Father's enjoyment of telling a story against himself, though it was actually poor Teddy Boston who got the soaking, exactly as described in the story.

### ***Mike's Whistle***

Something like this, too, occurred during one of their visits, though I confess I do not know whether a cow was involved. Certainly an engine's whistle disappeared into the upper atmosphere.

### ***Useful Railway***

The basis for this story is, I suspect, in the 'could have happened' category. A trailer-load of wool-bales falls on to the track and Rex collides with them - no doubt someone better versed than I in Ravenglass lore will now write and say "Yes, this happened at so and so in so and so..." I very much hope they do.

## ***ENTERPRISING ENGINES, (1968)***

### ***Tenders for Henry***

*Flying Scotsman* comes to visit Tidmouth and Henry is jealous because he has two tenders. But he is not so happy when he discovers that the extra tenders he is offered by Duck contain only boiler-sludge.

### ***Super Rescue***

This story, as acknowledged in my father's Foreword, is based on an incident which happened to a young correspondent while on a journey to Waterloo in April 1967. A diesel fails and is helped home by Henry - who is also, at least technically, 'failed' because he has lost his regulator.

### ***Escape***

I had, until recently, thought this story of Oliver's escape to the Island of Sodor, with railwaymen in the know helping him on his way, to be pure fiction, though the basic idea of preserving locomotives was gathering momentum at the time. Then during the time I was writing this book, I came across, in a magazine, a photograph of a waybill which, it was said, railwaymen had deliberately altered so that No.71000, *Duke of Gloucester* was sent, not to a scrapyard where it would have been immediately cut up, but to Woodham's Yard in Barry, where it was able to languish until rescued. Maybe Father, back in 1967, had heard that tale too.

### ***Little Western***

This story is the logical and largely fictional outcome of the previous one - Oliver has escaped, the Fat Controller, unknown to everybody else, actually knows all about the extra engine hidden in the Yard and has arranged to keep him, so all ends happily.

## ***OLIVER THE WESTERN ENGINE, (1969)***

The Fat Controller has opened a new branch line, running northwards along the coast from Tidmouth to Arlesburgh, the railhead for the Arlesdale Railway portrayed in *Small Railway Engines* - see above. Oliver, newly-acquired, and Duck, with assistance from Donald and Douglas, have been deputed to run it.

### ***Donald's Duck***

I confess I have absolutely no idea where the germ of this story came from - perhaps a combination of Duck's name, the Disney character and a bird of some description nesting in an old tender - which is certainly factual. Whatever, it is a splendid opportunity for Duck and Donald to have some fun with a duck-egg. The duck (Dilly) takes up residence at Haultraugh.

### ***Resource and Sagacity***

Oliver is getting above himself but is brought - literally - down to earth by ballast trucks who push him into the turntable pit at Arlesburgh. As for

the origin of the story, more and better engines have ended up in Oliver's undignified position.

### **Toad Stands By**

Father enjoyed, I think, the pun included in the name given to a particular type of Great Western brake van. Toad is of the old, respectful school, and he and Oliver combine to dispose of Scruffey, a rude and very decrepit Private Owner wagon who is making a nuisance of himself. Many Private Owner wagons were less well-maintained than they should have been and I think it highly likely that something similar occurred to such a vehicle, though I am unable to quote chapter and verse for it.

### **Bulgy**

Bulgy is another of Father's less pleasant characters, who, having tried to steal passengers from the railway under false pretences, gets his come-uppance when he is wedged under a railway bridge. It happened in Lewes High Street, *The Evening Standard* told its readers, probably late in 1962, though the bus involved was actually a trolley-bus on a low-loader en route to the scrapyard. At least Bulgy did not finish up there.

### **DUKE THE LOST ENGINE, (1970)**

"An engine lost in the South American jungle was found after 30 years. A tree had grown through its chimney and hornets nested in its firebox." The quotation comes from the Foreword to this book, and I am fairly certain that this was the starting point for what follows.

### **Granpuff**

"Granpuff" was the affectionate name by which his grandchildren knew my father, and his use of it as the title for this story is a good indication that he was proud of it. The story takes us back to the early days of the Mid Sodor Railway, the narrow gauge line from which came Peter Sam and Sir Handel - but their names were Stuart and Falcon then. There was also another engine, older than either of them, called Duke - whom they nicknamed 'Granpuff'. When the line closed Stuart and Falcon were sold, but Duke was put away in a shed and...disappeared.

### **Bulldog**

Falcon, double-heading with Duke, becomes derailed on a rough piece of track - ostensibly through inattention to it - but is held to Duke by his coupling. Duke saves the day by hanging on like a bulldog. There is then a water crisis: something similar happened on the Talylllyn Railway and was solved as described: the old Ealing Comedy *The Titfield Thunderbolt* used the same idea, also drawn from the Talylllyn incident.

### **You Can't Win**

In this story Stuart is called to assist when Duke 'fails'. Duke is not so badly failed as Stuart thinks, however, and visitors, to Stuart's chagrin

and Duke's amusement, think that the elderly Duke has been rescuing him! There are overtones of *Super Rescue* here - see above, but in a new setting and with a new slant.

### **Sleeping Beauty**

The Arlesdale Railway - see Chapter 2 - is laid on the trackbed of the Mid Sodor Railway, and the Thin and Fat Clergymen, hearing of Duke's disappearance, set out to find him. The Fat Clergyman does so, accidentally, and Duke is taken away for repair; on the final page of the book he is re-united with Falcon and Stuart, now of course, Sir Handel and Peter Sam, on the Skarloey Railway.

There was no new book in 1971. Instead the publishers produced a wallet containing various items connected with the Railway Series - colouring sheets, an information pack, etc. - which they called A Surprise Packet. The Railway Series was resumed next year with...

### **TRAMWAY ENGINES, (1972)**

#### **Ghost Train**

Father obviously came across a tale of a railway collision involving something carrying lime, and evolved an amusing little ghost story as a result - this goes down very well with children when read aloud. Crowe's Farm Crossing lies between the tunnel and Hackenbeck on Thomas's branch line.

#### **Woolly Bear**

I have no doubt of the authenticity of this story, for Father often mentioned it as an example of odd things that could happen - what he failed to mention, at least to me, were the details of the two vital elements of where and when it did happen! Certainly too on the Talylllyn as, I suspect, on many other lines, cutting-side hay was sold to local farmers as a way of slightly improving the bottom line.

#### **Mavis**

Mavis is introduced in this story. Drewry diesels like Mavis had run the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway after the steam trams were scrapped from 1953, and by 1972 they had gone too - but see *Locomotives*. On a frosty day Mavis stops where she cannot restart her train and Toby has to rescue her - the story recalls experiences at what was virtually the only 'hill' on the Tramway and the embarrassment that could ensue if the driver stopped in the wrong place on a hard winter day.

#### **Toby's Tigh trope**

I believe that the origin of this story is in America, when a timber trestle virtually disappeared before a horrified driver's eyes! Toby is the unfortunate engine involved here, and Mavis, by helping in his rescue, is able to redeem herself for previous misdemeanours.

This was the final story my father wrote for the Railway Series, though he did write another story, *Thomas's Christmas Party* for the first TV series at the request of Britt Allcroft, which was published in time for Christmas 1984. He also adapted two of his earlier stories - *Thomas Comes to Breakfast* and *Thomas and the Breakdown Train* - as picture books.

Almost exactly ten years after Father's completion of Book 26 in the Railway Series I wrote my first 'Thomas' story, based on an idea given to me by an engine driver on the Nene Valley Railway. It was begun more as an exercise than because I thought it would be worth anything, but it turned out quite well, so I added three more. Both my father and his publishers thought they were worth more than I did, so in the autumn of 1983 the Series continued with...

### **REALLY USEFUL ENGINES, (1983)**

#### **Stop Thief!**

I culled this incident in late 1982 from one of John Thomas's books about Scottish railways, I think the Callander & Oban. The stationmaster at Ffarquhar has had his gardening cups and car stolen. During a subsequent journey Thomas recognises the car, his crew get a message to the police and both cups and car are recovered.

#### **Mind that Bike**

Definitely a 'could happen', this one, and I would very much hope it never actually does (or has). Boys are playing with a bicycle on Ffarquhar platform: it runs out of control down the end ramp and, fortunately without anyone on it, disappears beneath Percy's wheels just as he starts away.

#### **Fish**

Duck, banking Henry and 'The Flying Kipper', up Gordon's Hill, falls behind the train he is assisting without realising it because the tail-lamp of the fish-train has fallen off. Without his banker Henry slows down; in the dark, Duck is unaware of this and when he catches up there is a collision in which Duck is slightly damaged. As here, a missing tail-lamp was responsible for something similar on the Lickey before the Second World War, though I converted the original common or garden goods train to 'The Flying Kipper' to provide (I hope) added interest.

#### **Triple-Header**

The idea for this, my very first Thomas story, was suggested to me by a driver on the Nene Valley Railway, who told of an incident when a 6-wheeled tank engine (incidentally, also named *Thomas*) had, in an emergency, gone to the rescue of a train that was far beyond its normal capacity and run out of steam a mere hundred yards from home. I brought in Duck and Percy to create a triple-header in which, one by one, each of the engines 'runs out of puff'.

### **JAMES AND THE DIESEL ENGINES, (1984)**

#### **Old Stuck-Up**

The book's theme, if it can be said to have one, is James's mistrust of diesel engines. A haughty diesel, after spending a night in the steam shed and annoying all the engines, slithers through the end-wall and leaves in disgrace. The idea for this tale came from a photograph in *Railway World* of a steam engine (actually an A4 'Pacific') peering through the broken end-wall of an engine shed. To change the steam engine to a diesel seemed to add weight to James's attitude.

#### **Crossed Lines**

James, while shunting in fog, has a misunderstanding with the signalman and a bogie wagon has its bogies diverted along different tracks, demolishing a signal in the process. Such diversions are not uncommon, in fact, and nor were mistaken whistles in fog, but the signal was an added extra.

#### **Fire Engine**

Henry's tender coupling breaks and, in throwing out his fire, his crew accidentally set alight the sleepers beneath him. I cannot now recall the precise incident that sparked (if that is the right word) this story, but I am assured by those who know - and who, possibly in some cases, had been responsible! - that such a thing has occurred more than once.

#### **Deep Freeze**

This too was taken from an authentic incident when, on a very frosty day, a locomotive's tender was filled so full that ice sealed the filler cap and lack of air pressure in the tender caused both injectors to fail. In this story it happens to James who, rescued willy-nilly from his predicament by a diesel (curiously with no identifying marks, though clearly a Class 47), comes to the conclusion that maybe even diesels have their uses.

### **GREAT LITTLE ENGINES, (1985)**

The title of this, my first foray into the world of the Skarloey Railway, echoes that of a marketing group to which many of the Welsh railways belong, the Great Little Trains of Wales - one suspects that only those in the know actually got the point, but I don't think it's actually a bad title anyway. For a few years during the 1980s the Tallyllyn Railway 'borrowed' Sir Handel, and these stories make reference to his visit to Wales.

#### **Patience is a Virtue**

Sir Handel, at the invitation of the Tallyllyn Railway, is asked to go to Wales and gets above himself in consequence. He is sobered down a little when his Guard is left behind because the crowd of passengers in the van, Beatrice, does not give him space to enter. I witnessed the same problem on the Tallyllyn during early days on the Railway.





### ***Peter Sam and the Prickly Problem***

Peter Sam boasts that the hedge-trimmings collected on either side of the line can easily be swept aside. He soon finds, however, that when brambles are involved it's not such an easy matter and he has to be cut out of his predicament. This too is taken from an incident which occurred in the early Preservation days of the Talyllyn, and so far as I can judge does not differ much from the original - only the names have been changed...

### ***'Pop' Special***

The re-telling of yet another incident excavated from the Talyllyn's past - parties of Scouts gave great assistance to the line in a number of ways during early Preservation times, and this tale tells of a very hot day when liquid refreshment was badly needed and was hard to come by. Duncan's suggestion of a solution make him the hero of the piece but there are also overtones of the Vale of Rheidol Railway, where there was once a shop purveying such comestibles close to the terminus at the top end of the line.

### ***Sir Handel Comes Home***

The title says it all, really, and is a resume of some of the incidents which happened on the Talyllyn during the time Sir Handel was there, complete with an incident just before he left when he ran into a tree at Dolgoch and spent the next day with a bandaged eye. The book is rounded off with a reference to Skarloey's 'twin', *Talyllyn*.

### ***MORE ABOUT THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE, (1986)***

The book for 1986 had already been written when it was discovered that Britt Allcroft, anxious to continue with the second TV Series could not, under the terms of her contract, use a set of stories especially written unless they appeared in book form first. The planned book quickly became this one in order to extricate her from her problem and the swiftness of its genesis perhaps accounts for, to my mind, the least effective title in the entire Series - I feel sure we could have thought of something better had we had more time...

### ***Thomas, Percy and the Coal***

All the stories in this book take place on Thomas's branch line, mostly at or near Ffarquhar. The general theme is a feud between Thomas and Percy, sparked off in this first tale when Thomas, somewhat unjustly, considers Percy responsible for his getting covered with coal-dust. Incidentally, the incident on which the story is based happened exactly as described and not in the (improbable) fashion portrayed in the TV Series.

### ***The Runaway***

Thomas, after repairs, has a stiff handbrake. A relief fireman, not remembering this, thinks it is on when it isn't and Thomas, complete

with train, runs away from Knapford Junction passing several stations before he is caught by an Inspector. It happened first with one of the 'Jazz' trains out of Liverpool Street, which got some distance along, I think, the Ilford line before an upgrade slowed it sufficiently for someone to hop on board. Ms Allcroft had particularly requested a story with Harold in it, so although not authentic to the original, I was able to oblige since an airfield happens to be conveniently situated beside Thomas's branch line.

### ***Better Late than Never***

Delays to trains on the main line because the viaduct is under repair mean Thomas's branch line service is kept waiting so that passengers can keep connections - okay, that's not very authentic to today's Big Railway, but this is the Island of Sodor and the Fat Controller runs trains as a service to his passengers. Thomas's lateness is remarked by Bertie, but then Bertie breaks down himself, and Thomas, running late as usual, is able to come to the rescue of his passengers and take them on to Ffarquhar. This was taken from an incident read about somewhere, though I'm afraid I cannot now recall exactly where, of a train which was able to help a bus instead of the more usual (these days) *vice versa*.

### ***Drip-Tank***

A story which seems to work quite well when read aloud, but about which I nowadays feel slightly uneasy - perhaps because the word 'drip' is no longer current jargon. In the context, however, 'wimp' would hardly fit with Thomas's punctured water-tank, so little can now be done about it. Thomas's tank is damaged by a broken coupling-rod, Percy comes to the rescue and the two tank engines make up their differences.

### ***GORDON THE HIGH-SPEED ENGINE, (1987)***

#### ***High-Speed Gordon***

We have all met Gordon's boasting before, and here, once again, it is about how fast he can go. One frosty morning his train is arranged in such a way that he has to stand outside Tidmouth station - he slips on starting, catches the water in his cylinders and his driver cannot close the regulator. Gordon's wheels go on spinning for 15 minutes and wear grooves in the rails - he slinks away in shamed silence to the shed. Sir William Stanier's 'Princess Coronation' class had a propensity for doing this sort of thing, and as Gordon has a Stanier 'underneath' (see Locomotives) it seemed to me not impossible that he might have inherited the trait.

#### ***Smokescreen***

Wedding guests at the Bluebell Railway were once (and one hopes it was only once) showered with soot from an engine funnel, and ash thrown from the window is recorded too. Gordon, smarting after his 'spinning'



debacle, is trying hard to redeem himself, but all he seems able to do is to incur the Fat Controller's further wrath. He first smothers wedding guests at Wellsworth with soot, while ashes are blown on to the Fat Controller's new top hat at the same place on the return journey. To say that the Fat Controller is not pleased is an understatement.

### **Fire Escape**

Gordon, still anxious to atone for his misdemeanors, loses his firebars while climbing the Hill, and is congratulated for his recovery work but not wholly forgiven for his other mishaps. The actual incident on which the story is based occurred on the Lickey, and the solution given is as described in *Steam Railway* by the fireman who had been involved.

### **Gordon Proves his Point**

Gordon arrives at Barrow, on the Mainland, to find a failed railtour. He is pressed into service - steam is recorded as having substituted for diesel on a Cumbrian Coast Express - his own service back to Tidmouth being taken by a High Speed Train, topped and tailed by Philippa and Emma - Pip and Emma for short. Pip has failed already (loss of coolant, a recurring problem for HSTs on the Big Railway at this time), and before the journey is done Emma fails too. They are pushed to Tidmouth by James, where they make friends with the others. Gordon, having distinguished himself with the Railtour, comes home next day, is forgiven and all ends happily.

### **TOBY, TRUCKS AND TROUBLE, (1988)**

This title, at No.32 in the Series, was the first not to have the word 'engine' or 'engines' in it. While it seemed a pity that the tradition was broken it became a precedent in that we did not attempt to so restrict ourselves thereafter.

### **Mavis and the Lorry**

The origin of this story, a confrontation between a diesel engine and a lorry, took place on the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway outside the Blacksmith Arms, Elm, on a sharp curve in the road between Wisbech and Downham Market. Here, on the tramway to the quarry above Ffarquhar station, a lorry-driver new to the Island of Sodor is surprised by both the bend in the road and the fact of seeing a train on it - whether the original lorry-driver had the same excuse I have no idea!

### **Toby's Seaside Holiday**

Toby reminisces about the occasion when, in the old days, he was smartened up to go as an 'attraction' at a Festival in a village near the sea on the English east coast. When he gets there those in charge decide he is so smart that he shows their branch line up to disadvantage and he is sent home again. Something similar occurred in connection with a well-

known east-coast Music Festival soon after the War - my informant, who is acknowledged in the book, was one of the organisers from the railway side.

### **Bulstrode**

I was very lucky with this story, a simple one about a disagreeable barge who meets his come-uppance when loaded stone trucks run away on the quayside at Knapford Harbour and sink him. My original idea for the third story of this book had failed to come up to scratch and my deadline was fast approaching: the first bit of luck was when I read of the sinking in similar circumstances of a barge when coal trucks ran away at a dock in South Wales - the second lucky break was that the story 'came' so well that very little revision was needed (almost the only time!) and my deadline was met.

### **Toby Takes the Road**

For this story I used the same bend on Toby's tramway as in Story 1, though in fact the tale I had from the driver concerned occurred at a point on the Wisbech & Upwell Tramway a mile or so nearer Wisbech than the incident in Story 1. Toby's wheels, pushed off the rails by frozen earth, carry straight on instead of taking the curve. The way the driver and firemen got them back on the rails is just as I was told it.

### **THOMAS AND THE TWINS, (1989)**

#### **Scrambled Eggs**

Because there are maintenance works on his branch line Thomas is dispatched to help, temporarily, on Edward's branch. At the china clay harbour he encounters Bill and Ben and their teasing in a story involving a change of colour from blue to yellow. The incident with the broken-down lorry, its contents and the result is authentic, but the rest of the tale is down to invention.

#### **What a Picture!**

Mr Bill Rogers, a retired driver of the Port of Par engines on which Bill and Ben are based and who had helped Father in the preparation of *Main Line Engines* (see above), inspired this story during a visit I made to him at his cottage in St Austell: he had, unfortunately, died before he could see the finished version. In fact it combines two of his tales, one involving enthusiasts and photographs and the other a vessel nearly grounded in the harbour and rescued by the engines. On the Island of Sodor the china clay harbour is at Brendam, at the end of Edward's branch line.

#### **Trevor Helps Out**

This story takes place near Wellsworth, close to the point at which Edward's branch joins the main line - a similar derailment of goods wagons did actually happen, though one suspects that a traction engine

was not so handy to pass on a warning. But the story is arranged so that Trevor is nearby, earning a new boiler as a result of his prompt action.

### ***Down the Drain***

This story too is based on one of Bill Rogers' tales, and though I think it was not one within his personal experience, I have no reason to doubt its authenticity. Bad weather causes an area between the china clay quarry and the harbour at Brendam to flood, and Ben is stranded. Thomas comes to the rescue, and the Twins resolve never to tease him again. Maybe!

### ***JOCK THE NEW ENGINE, (1990)***

It had been my wish for some time to continue the Ravensglass & Eskdale-based saga Father had begun in *Small Railway Engines*. My father, after the earlier book, had developed an engine to 'match' the Ravensglass line's *Northern Rock* but had never had the chance to write stories about him - this became my opportunity. I was helped by the Sales Department at the publishers, for when my Editor pursed her lips dubiously at a book which did not mention Thomas, they said: "Great, a new engine - we've been hoping for one of them for years!"

### ***We Need Another Engine***

Frank is cross at being omitted from *Small Railway Engines* and collides with the Arlesburgh shed wall - he is later able to redeem himself by rescuing Rex after a steam-pipe failure. On the day of the publication of *Small Railway Engines* (1967), Perkins, Frank's alter ego, really did collide with the shed wall, in annoyance, it was suggested, at not being in the new book. My family and I, in 1988, were on board a train that Perkins rescued after *River Esk's* steam-pipe failed. This story forms an example of two incidents, actually happening some while apart, coming together in a single story.

### ***Sticking-Power***

A coupling breaks between Bert and his coaches at Arlesdale, but the broken parts are stuck together with glue and Bert is able to get his train home. Quickly, before loud howls of "Impossible!" and "Don't be ridiculous!" arise, it is on record that an adhesive company once did precisely as described in the story as a publicity stunt for their product, on the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway.

### ***Jock***

The new engine, as yet without a name, appears in an odd shade of undercoat. Douglas, who happens to be nearby, says it reminds him of the old days when similarly-painted engines in Scotland (they would have belonged to the Highland Railway) were nicknamed 'Jocks'. Both the name and the colour stick.

### ***Teamwork***

Jock proves his worth with a container of sleepers, but his colleagues get a little weary of his boasting; finally, between them, they prove the value of teamwork. The container incident is an authenticated Ravensglass story, but the rest of the tale, though I have a faint recollection of Father having told me something similar, is down to my fancy.

### ***THOMAS AND THE GREAT RAILWAY SHOW, (1991)***

The inspiration for this book was really a gentleman called Rob Shorland-Ball, who was on the staff of the National Railway Museum in the late 1880s when the roof of the Great Hall needed renewal and the concept of The Great Railway Show was born. He suggested that it would be nice if Thomas could be involved, and though it was a while before I worked out how it could be done in an authentic manner, this book was the result.

### ***Museum-Piece***

An introductory story really, though something like the level-crossing incident in which Thomas becomes involved did actually happen. Thomas is invited to York for The Great Railway Show and, amid a certain amount of rather jealous bickering from the other engines, sets out on his journey. He is - literally - stopped in his tracks when he collides with a level-crossing gate.

### ***Not the Ticket***

Thomas arrives at York on a low-loader, but while the lorry-driver asks for directions to the NRM an officious traffic-warden slaps a parking ticket on the lorry. Some Christmases ago a locomotive belonging to the Nene Valley Railway was parked on a low-loader in Peterborough's old market square as part of a charity fund-raiser: the low-loader and its driver were given a parking ticket.

### ***Trouble on the Line***

This began as a cautionary tale, the idea of which was a warning to readers that steam locomotives can be dangerous and are unable to stop quickly. The story, in which Thomas becomes concerned about the crowds and then a lunch box falls in front of him, causing an emergency stop, gradually became watered down between fears of fright to readers from the publishers and possible reflections on crowd-control arrangements from the Museum, until it became but a shadow of its former self. A pity - the original version flowed far better as a story, and all we can do to show children that railways are not to be trifled with should, in my view, be encouraged.

### ***Thomas and the Railtour***

Crowds are thronging to the steam-hauled railtours to the seaside (Scarborough, though it is not named in the story), and in order to cater





for everyone strengthening the train - ie, adding extra carriages - becomes the only option. Thomas volunteers to help *Green Arrow* and, coupled in front on the way home, spots a landslip by the river at Kirkstead Abbey. Before going back to Sodor Thomas is given a plaque commemorating his visit. There were (and still are) steam trips from York to Scarborough, but so far as I know none of them have ever been stopped by a landslip at Kirkstead.

### **THOMAS COMES HOME, (1992)**

The title of this book is, I fear, a complete misnomer, but the publishers insisted on dragging Thomas into it despite the fact that Thomas appears only on the last page of the last story. The stories in fact tell of what happened on Thomas's branch line while he was away at York.

#### **Snow Problem**

Daisy, after bragging how much she likes snow, is stranded in a snowdrift near the airfield at Toryreck and finds she doesn't like it a bit: Harold comes to the rescue of the passengers and Daisy has to stay there for a week! Trains cut off in snow are no new thing, and for a week at a time is not unknown, but this one, with snow blocking Daisy's air-intake, has echoes of the 'wrong sort of snow' slip of the tongue which the big railway has found so hard to live down.

#### **Washout!**

The bridge across the Hackenbeck Brook, just beyond the tunnel on Thomas's branch line, has been weakened by floodwater and collapses shortly after Percy, with Annie and Clarabel, crosses it. A similar story was told once in, I believe, *The Railway Magazine*, though I have unfortunately mislaid the precise reference.

#### **Toby's Megatrain**

This story is based on another Wisbech & Upwell incident, when an engine crew, with a very long train at the height of the fruit season, thought they could make it back to Wisbech but found that they couldn't. Like Toby when caught in a similar situation, they had to leave the train and go on to their destination to get water before returning to pick up their train. The crew's 'wheel-pull' on Toby is simply added whimsy.

#### **Thomas Comes Home**

Thomas is on his way back from York and the Fat Controller has arranged a 'welcome home' reception at Knapford Junction. But George the steamroller has been repairing the road at the level crossing between Knapford and Dryaw and, when the work is done, leaves behind a traffic cone which blows under Daisy, hurrying to the party. It damages her brakes, which need a fitter's attention but in spite of her misgivings she makes it in time - just. The cone/brake incident is authentic but the rest, other than the NRM plaque, is fiction.

### **HENRY AND THE EXPRESS, (1993)**

#### **Out of Puff**

Henry, with an excess of hot ash from poor coal collecting in his smokebox, suffers from a warped smokebox door and the consequent lack of a vacuum causes failure at Wellsworth. His driver and fireman use paper-mache to make an airtight seal inside his smokebox door, so that he can get his train home. Both the problem with the hot ash and the paper-mache seal are authentic, and I came across the latter when reading some years ago of a similar incident on the Somerset & Dorset Joint line.

#### **Overhaul**

Henry, on his way to the works for overhaul, is once again brought to a stand, this time near Killdane and this time as a driving-wheel tyre begins to disintegrate. He cannot get home on his own, and James, with whom he was double-heading, takes the train on. I quote *The Railway Magazine*, November 1924: "On Sunday October 5, 1924, a tyre became detached from one of the coupled wheels of the leading engine of a double-headed Glasgow-London express while travelling at high speed near Weedon... The broken tyre caused considerable damage to the station, though luckily no-one was on the platform at the time."

#### **Sliding Scales**

James, during Henry's absence, is assigned to 'The Flying Kipper,' a job he hates: he is just about to leave the fish dock when a pile of fish-boxes falls from a forklift, across the rails in front of him. Scales and fish-oil make the rails slippery and it is some time before James finally finds his feet... This story is based on a 1950s incident when an LNER 2-6-0, following a fish train, found itself in trouble during a climb towards the Forth Bridge thanks to material that had leaked from one of the preceding fish vans.

#### **Henry Sees Red**

Henry's overhaul at Crovan's Gate is progressing, but he has not yet had a full repaint when an emergency needs him on the line. He comes to the rescue - but in a becoming pink undercoat. The particular incident on which this story is based is one involving a Stanier 'Jubilee' class locomotive in a similar situation, but I rather suspect that this isn't the only example of such a thing happening.

### **WILBERT THE FOREST ENGINE, (1994)**

This book, I make no bones about it, was written in response to special pleading from the Dean Forest Railway, of which Father was then President. As with the earlier NRM book it was some time before I realised how I could, logically and authentically, transfer Wilbert to the Island of Sodor, but once that was solved the stories fell easily into place.

### ***Percy's Porridge***

In 1993 I was asked to visit Abingdon School in Middlesbrough to spend a morning with a class and work on a Thomas story with the children. As a starting point I posited an incident I had recently read about, where bags of maize in South Africa, had burst open on a railway during a heavy rainstorm. Though there were, as one might expect from children with no great experience of railways, a good many 'non-railwaylike' suggestions for our story, I was able to go away afterwards and, with their permission, prepare a more 'authentic' version for publication. The title, combined with the second sentence of this note, should tell all...

### ***Cab Over Wheels***

I confess I cannot now recall chapter and verse for the incident which sparked off this story, but I have no doubt it is authenticated at wherever Austerity locomotive No.16 is now preserved. To cover for Percy's mishap, Wilbert is diverted to Thomas's branch line and in a tale which he tells in Ffarquhar shed to Thomas and Toby, No.16, much too big for his wheels, goes - literally - too far and topples down the side of a slag-bank in a steelworks.

### ***Foaming at the Funnel***

This story is based on one my Uncle George told me of an engine which was inadvertently taken to a milk-loading stand instead of to the watertower. Need one say more? The dairy in question here is at Elsbridge. But a title - almost always the last thing I do with a story - eluded me for some time until I suddenly realised that a phrase I had written in the middle of it would do admirably.

### ***Wired-up***

Wilbert, having done his emergency duty on Thomas's branch line, now moves to where he had originally been intended for, the branch between Tidmouth and Arlesburgh. The causality for the book envisages that the Fat Controller wishes to assess the capabilities of a 0-6-0 Austerity tank engine with a view to obtaining one to help on the branch. During a visit to Arlesburgh, Wilbert meets the small railway engines and is able to suggest a way that a problem with a broken coupling might be overcome. I can find no note of this incident in any of my records: I suspect I must have read it - perhaps in *Steam Railway* or somewhere similar - and used it almost at once without recording it.

### ***THOMAS AND THE FAT CONTROLLER'S ENGINES, (1995)***

This book was planned as *The Fat Controller's Engines*, which makes more sense in the context of the stories, until a last-minute publisher's unilateral decision altered it - it wouldn't have been so galling had they not asked me to the annual Sales Conference to talk about it beforehand. I can only imagine that the change was made at the request of the sales

force. The book was written, anyway, to celebrate in 1995 the 50th anniversary of the publication of the first book in the Railway Series in May 1945.

### ***Birdstrike***

Gordon, in full cry with the express, raises a cloud of crows in front of him, one of which collides with the vacuum brake pipe and knocks out the stopper. As mentioned in the story, an incident like this happened on the Great Western in 1915.

### ***Edward and the Cabbages***

Edward, hurrying one day, loses a bogie wheel, which bounds along beside the train until it disappears into a field of cabbages. This story, not it has to be admitted, very different in idea from the earlier one about Henry - see *Overhaul*, above, is based on a separate unidentified and undated cutting in my father's scrapbook.

### ***Rabbits***

Near the airfield station on Thomas's branch line is a short, steep hill - rabbits have undermined this, but before anything can be done about it the track goes wide of gauge and Thomas is derailed. Rolvenden bank, on the Kent & East Sussex Railway, also undermined by rabbits and repaired at great expense, was the starting point for this story, and the method of re-railing Thomas described has been confirmed by permanent way staff as what they might do in similar circumstances.

### ***Golden Jubilee***

A 'could have happened' story this one, for a funnel spider, weaving a web among the electrics of a signalbox could, I am assured by personnel at the National Environmental Research Council, cause exactly this sort of disruption. The story is, otherwise, an excuse to collect all the engines together for a 50th-anniversary celebration.

### ***NEW LITTLE ENGINE, (1996)***

#### ***Speedkiller***

Problems with slipping after the weedkilling train has passed by have been experienced on the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway, so why not on the Skarloey Railway too? Rheneas is brought to a stand but bravely manages to get his train to the end of the line.

#### ***Sir Handel's Plan***

The Talylyn Railway's engines are far too well-behaved for anything like this to have happened there, but their No.3 does use firebars which have to be specially ordered. Feeling disgruntled, Sir Handel decides when his firebars collapse that it is a good opportunity for a rest. But the staff are working on a new engine and no-one has time to spare for Sir Handel...



### **Dirty Water**

Peter Sam tells a story of an incident while he was on the Talyllyn Railway when a problem with the water softening procedure caused him to 'prime' and make him emit sludgy water from his funnel. He is reminded of this episode by two visitors from the Talyllyn, Lizi and Kathy (see People, above), and retells the story at their prompting. He tells how he was put on to the centre road (ie, spare track) so that visitors could see him and would not be disappointed at missing him, but, one gathers, it was not a day he much enjoyed.

### **I Name This Engine**

Mr Ivo Hugh (see People, above) is to perform the naming of the new engine, but only the Thin Controller knows what the name is to be, and he's not saying. There are various adventures on the way to the event, and we finally discover why everyone, including Ivo Hugh, has been kept in the dark. In 1990 the Talyllyn launched *Tom Rolt*, the *alter ego* of Ivo Hugh, which was named by Tom Rolt's widow. Though Father never had time to write the story, he worked out a name for his new engine that fitted exactly, even down to the number of letters in each of the two names - perhaps intended as a final tribute to a man whom he had regarded highly.

## **Thomas: A Crown Worth Fighting For**

This year, as anyone with the stamina to have read this far will be aware, sees the 60th anniversary of the publication of the first volume in my father's 'Railway Series' and this volume will, if all goes to plan, be available in time to mark that event in May. It was planned partly because it seemed at one stage that neither HIT Entertainment, owners of the Thomas 'Rights' nor the company it franchises to produce the books (Egmont Publishing Ltd) seemed likely to do anything to celebrate the impending Diamond Jubilee, but largely because so many people were writing and asking about Father's earlier book, *The Island of Sodor, its People, History and Railways*. This book, published by Kaye & Ward in 1987, has been out of print for almost 15 years now. One of the things omitted from the book was any detail about the stories themselves. This omission the present volume has set out to correct and has brought the information about the whole Series as up to date as possible.

As at March 2005 there has not been a new title in the series for nine years. The fact that the entire Series was to be re-formatted was given as an excuse not to do a new book for 1997, but after re-vamping a mere 14 this plan collapsed when the public made it clear that the revised format was disliked, and nothing new (in regard to the Railway Series) has appeared since 1996. Ever since, and particularly since 2002, I have been repeatedly asked when something new is coming, to which my somewhat lame reply has, of necessity, been something like:- "I suggest you ask the publishers, because they are not asking me."

In January 2005 a meeting was arranged with one of the Directors of Egmont Publishing, and we explained that it was becoming deeply embarrassing while acting as, in effect, their unpaid agents at Thomas events up and down the country, to have to say to people to who wanted a signature in one of my own books that a mere handful was available. The gentleman seem unaware of a very large body of material - some 40 titles - lying out of print, but to his credit he did ask to see photographs of the covers in case anything could be done. He also said he would be pleased to see any new material that I cared to submit. While this is a long way from saying that new stories will be available soon, I at least have not been idle and have on hand two new Railway Series books and seven other 'Thomas' stories, which may be enough to keep him going for a while. We must wait and see.

The survival of Thomas, as with the earlier Beatrix Potter series, depends upon the original stories. All the other stuff is ephemeral and titles produced for a cheap and quick turnover in 2002 are already forgotten. Many children born from 1995 onwards have never seen the original format books - and I emphasise these because it is in this style only that anyone will ever be able to acquire a complete set of 40. Because as



parents/grandparents we tend to buy for our children what we have known and loved ourselves, today's children will therefore, when they have children of their own, not even consider buying the Railway Series for them. And if the books aren't bought they will disappear - it is already happening - and gone will be stories that are still regarded as 'Classics'.

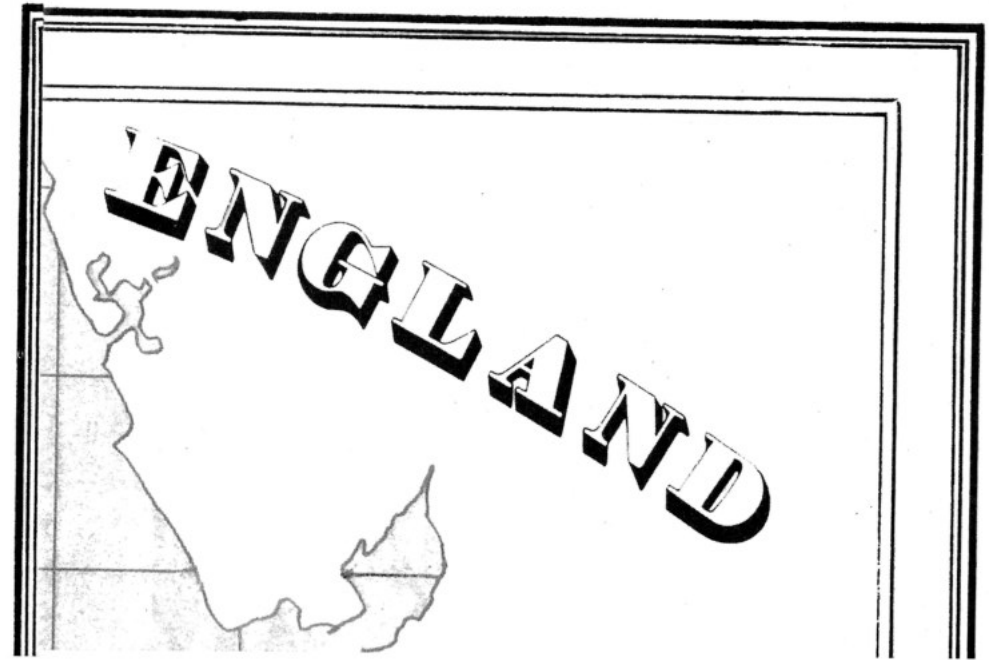
The man at Egmont referred to boxed sets of both Father's and my contributions to the series, which is a step forward, certainly, but not the answer for the child or parent who has, in the first instance perhaps only a fiver to spend and in the second 30 of the 40 books already and may be faced with a bill of £200 or more for two boxes in order to complete his/her set. Who can blame them for fixing on something different? As to the outcome of this saga only time will tell - we are doing what we can, and if you care to add your voice to ours, why not drop the publisher a line to that effect.

The TV situation is a little more complicated. We have become increasingly depressed and disheartened at the quality of the stories emanating from the Gullane company over the last few years. To be scrupulously fair, these should not be laid entirely at the door of HIT Entertainment since the shows were, apparently, filmed before they took over the 'Rights' in September 2003, though if they had felt too strongly about them I feel sure they could have stopped them if they had wished. What concerns me is that our rights as authors are being abused. 'Rights' held by HIT do not, and cannot, include the Intellectual Copyright of the creator/s of the characters, and it is the quality of Father's creation which, in my view, is being brought into disrepute. I do not speak as a lone voice for I know that many hold this opinion. A meeting to discuss these and other matters will be held in March 2005.

So perhaps the future can only get better. There is new material which, I hope, can be said to match the standards set by my father, and is certainly a good deal better than most of that currently prostituted under his name. Someone remarked the other day that if my father could see it he wouldn't just be spinning in his grave but humming as well! It is also true, happily, that the children who visit Thomas events up and down the country generally have a whale of a time, as do we when we visit. Between February and October 2005 115 or more weekends will be taken up with a Day Out With Thomas event on some railway or another in the UK and, sadly, there is no possibility that we can get to all of them - our tally will be a mere eight, in among various other events in the Thomas interest and tours of Canada and Scotland - but we shall certainly enjoy them

We hope we will be lucky enough to see you, but if not, trust you will have a good day. And if we do see you perhaps we shall be able to add another memorable piece to your collection, like the signed book that, the other week, we heard described as, "...our first item of Thomas regalia." Thomas, we feel, **has** a crown and it is worth fighting for.

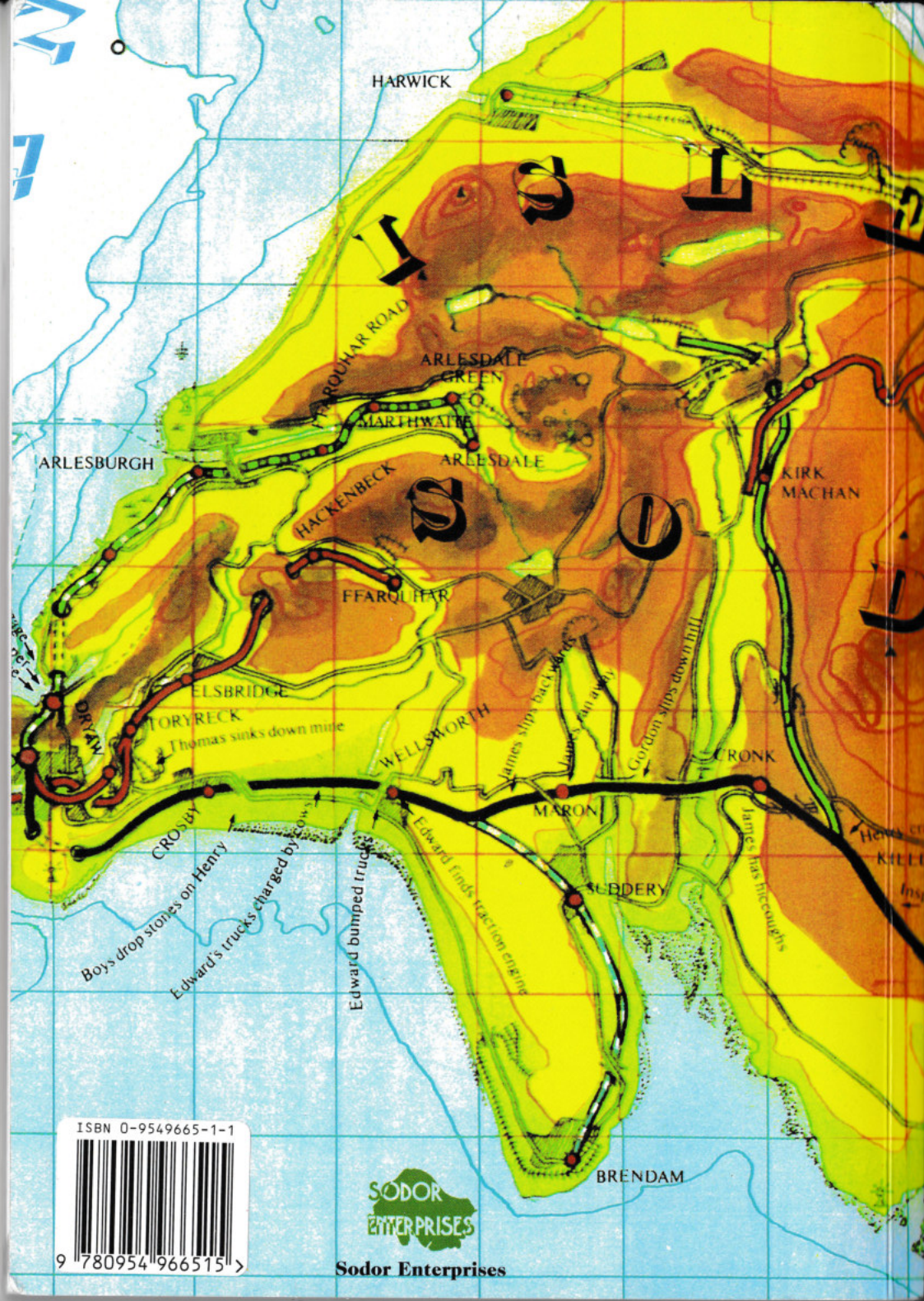




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Sodor: Reading Between the Lines





HARWICK

ARLESBURGH

ARLESDALE GREEN

MARTHWAITE

ARLESDALE

KIRK MACHAN

HACKENBECK

FFARQUHAR

ELLSBRIDGE

TORYRECK

Thomas sinks down mine

WELLSWORTH

James slips back ward

James runs away

Gordon slips down hill

CRONK

CROSBY

Boys drop stones on Henry

Edward's trucks charged by cow

Edward bumped trucks

Edward finds traction engine

MARON

LUDDERY

James has his thorough

Henry

KILL

Ins

BRENDAM

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